

A NEW PARADIGM FOR URBAN YOUTH MINISTRY:  
THE STORY OF UTH TURN IN NEW YORK CITY 1999-2008

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## ABSTRACT

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This project is the result of a decade-long study of Uth Turn—an early intervention project for at-risk urban youth. Run under the auspices of the Fund for Community Leadership and Development, and in conjunction with the New York Theological Seminary, Uth Turn has developed a model for youth intervention programs which attempts to prevent future involvement with the juvenile justice system. The program is run with the innovative use of the graduates of NYTS' Master of Professional Studies out of the Sing Sing Correctional Facility, who serve as facilitators to the young people. These men—as former at-risk youth, former inmates, and theology students—bring a unique perspective to their task. Combined with NYTS faculty, graduate students serving as interns, allied churches, and social service and law enforcement agencies, a program was developed which provided effective intervention and a low recidivism rate for the young people served. It is a faith-based program that can serve as a model to be replicated in urban areas across New York State and the nation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge my wife of forty-two years, Thelma Rollins Mason; my pastor, the Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III; and my four mentors in ministry, Dr. Dale Irvin, Dr. Eleanor Moody-Shepherd, Dr. Keith Russell, and Dr. Edward L. Hunt.

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## **Introduction**

This demonstration project represents the final phase of the Doctor of Ministry Program that began for this writer in the Fall Semester of 1998. This submission of “A New Paradigm for Urban Youth Ministry: The Story of Uth Turn in New York City 1999-2008” traces the experiences of a unique and cutting-edge at-risk youth intervention project. It is my goal that Uth Turn—launched in 1999 by New York Theological Seminary, the Ford Foundation, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services and NYTS partner churches—will be replicated in other urban communities in New York State and throughout the country.

The Abyssinian Baptist Church of the City of New York has been winning souls for Christ since 1808. Abyssinian Baptist Church has been my community of faith since joining in 1976 and has served as the spiritual anchor and support for my family and myself. But for my pastors--the Rev. Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor and the Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III—and the Abyssinian Church family who have shepherded and shaped my ministry, I would not be who I am and where I am today. For several years this writer represented Abyssinian as an attorney; served on the Trustee Board for ten years; and has served on the Deacon Board since 1990. My wife, Thelma Rollins Mason is the Chairperson of the Abyssinian Deaconess Board. The “village” of Abyssinian helped to rear all of our adult children—Kimara, Khalila, and Vernon Jr. On Palm Sunday, March 28, 1999, I was ordained to the Christian Ministry by the Abyssinian Baptist Church, The

American Baptist Churches of Metropolitan New York, and the United Missionary Baptist Association.

I started working for Uth Turn on April 1, 1999 and Abyssinian has been a Uth Turn site since the inception of the program. The Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III, Pastor of Abyssinian, has served on the Fund for Community Leadership Development, Inc. Board of Directors that operated Uth Turn for nine years and is the Chairperson of the FCLD Board. Dr. Butts has worked tirelessly to insure that FCLD, Inc. and Uth Turn continue to receive grant awards from our primary funder, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. It was both my involvement at Abyssinian and my attendance at New York Theological Seminary that led me to work with Uth Turn. Both institutions have a long tradition of practicing their faith through social and community involvement—Uth Turn is a direct outgrowth of both institutions.

## **Chapter One**

### **1998 The Early Years of the At-Risk Youth Intervention Project**

On October 19, 1998, the New York Theological Seminary submitted a proposal for an “At-Risk Youth Intervention Project” to the Ford Foundation and to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. That proposal was the seed from which Uth Turn has evolved. The At-Risk Youth Intervention Project (ARYIP) was sponsored by the Fund for Community Leadership Development—a non-profit affiliated with NYTS—to provide early intervention to a young, urban population at-risk of involvement with the criminal justice system. The need for such a program is captured in a remark by one of the graduates at the NYTS commencement exercise at the Sing Sing Correctional Facility (where inmates are offered the possibility of graduate studies offered by the New York Theological Seminary) who commented that had he “met as a youngster the kind of church people he had grown to know through NYTS, he would have changed his life and never wound up in prison.”<sup>1</sup> Religious congregations play a critical role in addressing and reducing the frequency of problems—be they crime, substance abuse, or other social ills—which are oftentimes concentrated in poor urban neighborhoods.

John J. DiIulio’s research offers support for involving religious institutions in the fight against urban social problems. Further, he maintains that the challenge is to “find ways of translating this good news into action, strengthen religious congregations, and to

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<sup>1</sup> New York Theological Seminary, *Demonstration Ministry Project*, Executive Summary, October 19, 1998, 1. See Appendix 1.



think of constitutionally acceptable ways of enlisting religious institutions in the battle to reduce violent youth crime and other urban problems.”<sup>2</sup> The plan for positive intervention in the lives of at-risk youth as proposed by New York Theological Seminary envisioned using the promise of their local resources.

New York Theological Seminary has a plan for intervention with at-risk youth in New York City. The plan is oriented toward those at greatest risk of violence to themselves or others, as well as toward those who are failing the measure of commonly accepted norms. The five-fold plan capitalizes on two unique, New York-based assets to address the problem of at-risk youth. The assets are: 1) the Seminary’s trans-denominational network of churches located in the five boroughs of New York City, and 2) graduates of the Seminary’s prison program of religious studies who have been released from Sing Sing with a commitment to public service and now reside in the city.<sup>3</sup>

On January 8, 1999 I had an interview with the New York Theological Seminary President, Dr. M. William Howard, and the Director of Development, Rev. William Grant, for the position of At-Risk Youth Intervention Project Program Administrator. I joined the ARYIP team as Program Administrator on April 1, 1999. By the spring of 1999 the Rev. William Grant was appointed Project Director, the Rev. Lonnie McLeod, Director of Field Operations, and I was appointed Director of Programs and Administration; funding totaling \$1.2 million had been secured from the Ford Foundation and the State of New York.<sup>4</sup>

The goals of ARYIP were to intervene in the lives of young people who were at risk whether from incarceration, injury or even death; to help them develop the attitudes, skills and behaviors that would allow them to become productive, positive members of their families, communities and society; and to serve as an alternative to incarceration,

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<sup>2</sup> John J. DiIulio, “Building Spiritual Capital: How Religious Congregations Cut Crime and Enhance Community Well Being,” Religion in American Life Briefing, The Manhattan Institute, October 5, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> NYTS, *Demonstration Ministry Project*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> “At Risk Youth Intervention Project Off and Running,” New York Theological Seminary, *Bulletin*, Summer 1999, 3.

reduce recidivism, and expose these young people to opportunities for fulfillment and development. The plan for intervention would work out of local churches; identify youth leaders in each neighborhood—and by intervening with them-- create change at the street level. By involving Seminary students, pastors, and faculty, the plan would directly impact the training of seminarians for an urban ministry, and in the process serve as a model for other educational institutions. The five components of the plan were as follows:<sup>5</sup>

1. Graduates of the NYTS Master's Program at Sing Sing, now released from prison; these men serve as outreach facilitators responsible for identifying and working with youth leaders and their followers;
2. Pastors and their congregations, who identify neighborhood areas for outreach, provide facilities for the facilitators and meetings; they are the resources for mentoring and community based programs;
3. Jim Brown's Amer-I-Can program, an intervention curriculum used successfully across the country with youth at risk, gang members and in schools; the facilitators will be trained by Amer-I-Can, and will also access other training methodologies to support their work;
4. NYTS M. Div students, who are placed via the Seminary's Field Placement Office with the facilitators to assist outreach work; supervised by the church pastor, the seminarians learn hands-on ministry skills;
5. Interdisciplinary Resource Team, composed of NYTS faculty and other social service disciplines; team members support the process in the field, facilitate connections to non-church resources and agencies, and guide the integration of lessons learned into the Seminary's curriculum.

The project was to roll out in four phases: research and development (1997-1998); a pilot phase (1999); an operational phase (2000-2001); and economic development to address the issue of jobs.

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<sup>5</sup> NYTS, Demonstration Ministry Project, 2.

The goals of Phase I were threefold. First, the management team and Project Director were to identify resources—organize the management team to recognize key organizations in Harlem and Brooklyn neighborhoods where the program would be instituted; choose the proper training resources—Amer-I-Can program and others; secure the necessary financial resources; and select the proper human resources—graduates of the NYTS MPS at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. Secondly, identify local community leadership in the selected neighborhoods—utilizing pre-existing community associations and leadership structures to lay the groundwork for cooperation. Thirdly, organize orientation sessions with the Amer-I-Can trainers and community leaders, boards, agencies, and local government officials. The MPS graduates trained as facilitators were prepared to conduct outreach to identify neighborhood teen leaders. The goals of Phase I were met during the first months of the program.

The Fund for Community Leadership Development (FCLD) began to implement Phase II in 1999. Ten sites were chosen to participate in the initial program. The five sites in Harlem were: Abyssinian Baptist Church, Church of the Living Hope, Memorial Baptist Church, Mount Calvary Baptist Church, and St. John's Baptist Church. In Brooklyn the five sites were: First Baptist Church Crown Heights, Flatbush Reformed Church, Greater Bright Light Baptist Church, Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church, and Triumphant Full Gospel Assembly. These churches provided facilities for meetings, sports and other recreational activities, tutoring, and meals. Further, the pastors of these churches play a crucial role in ARYIP—knowing that those involved in “activities of faith” are far less likely to get into trouble than those who are not. The tradition of success in ministering to the marginalized forms the foundation for the critical role of the

pastors in ARYIP. In “Life, Death and Young Black Males,” Harold Dean Trulear relates the story of one activist pastor. He tells of a conversation:

[b]egun by one of the gang members they passed on a weekly basis. This gang member had never spoken to these ministers before, but he knew who they were. They knew who he was as well...a ‘gangsta’ for whom another’s life could easily be interpreted as an obstacle. One day, this young man approached the ministers, singling out one of them for a one-on-one conversation. The two men disappeared for an hour...Rev. Brown asked his colleague what the young man had said to him. The reply still sends chills down Brown’s spine. He said...”can you help me find my conscience? I’ve got to get my conscience back.” In the midst of death, this young, black male—“gangsta,” killer, mercenary—was still alive. Though no one should glory in or romanticize the death in which he has participated, the truth is that there is yet life there in the midst of death—how else would he miss his conscience?<sup>6</sup>

As this vignette shows, the role of the local pastors cannot be overestimated.

Hundreds of young people were reached during the pilot phase—most having never participated in any program as positive and life affirming. Most however, have had encounters with school administrators, police officers, and the court system. Many are gang-affiliated; nearly all have been through the juvenile justice system to varying degrees.

The initial training for the project was organized through Jim Brown’s AMER-I-CAN program. This program was chosen because of its proven record of success in engaging at-risk youth, gang members, and inmates. “The I-CAN Program (I Can + Responsibility = Self-Determination) teaches life management skills...[to aid in] motivating participants to define and fulfill personal goals.”<sup>7</sup> Prior to the pilot phase, representatives of AMER-I-CAN met with and trained the management team, NYTS faculty, and the facilitators. They also visited several sites and provided assistance in

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<sup>6</sup> Harold Dean Trulear, “Are They Yet Alive? Life, Death and Young Black Males,” *The Living Pulpit* (July/September 1998): 42.

<sup>7</sup> Fund for Community Leadership Development, *Youth Turn: A Youth Intervention Project*, 2. See Appendix 2.

setting up the sites for implementation of their program. The AMER-I-CAN curriculum has not proven to be as effective as it was once thought to be. Both facilitators and interns believe the language to be too abstract and challenging to keep the young people interested in the exercises. It is not well suited to the mixed-gender and multi-ethnic population being served.

NYTS is taking steps to adapt it to their needs. Most importantly, the curriculum does not allow the facilitators' incredible skills and experiences to be put to their proper use. Both the facilitators and the interns have to adapt the curriculum by bringing to bear their own personal experiences and strengths. The breadth and depth of experiences, education and training that the Facilitators and interns bring to the program is enormous. The majority of Facilitators have their Master of Professional Studies,<sup>8</sup> and the typical NYTS student intern is in their second career.

In addition to the AMER-I-CAN training, the facilitators were provided with the resources of five local institutions:

- The Fordham School of Social Work provided Youth Turn with referral resources such as food, shelter, substance abuse, domestic violence, employment and other basic needs.
- The Queens College Program in Urban Studies provided demographic information related to crime, ethnicity, homelessness and other indices.
- Blanton-Peale Institute provided Facilitators with information on mental health and family dynamics, and counseling techniques that would allow Facilitators to approach youth as a group and on a one-on-one basis.
- InterCare provided information on drug and alcohol counseling for Facilitators and their youth.
- New York Theological Seminary, which provided leadership development to the Facilitators.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The Master of Professional Studies at Sing Sing Correctional Facility is a program of NYTS. The program was started in 1982 for those inmates who have achieved undergraduate degrees, demonstrated a faith commitment, and pledged to work in ministry while incarcerated.

<sup>9</sup> FCLD, *Youth Turn*, 3.

Outreach and interaction by the facilitators with the young people they intended to serve were difficult to achieve at first. The Intervention Project is very labor intensive and relies upon the facilitators in building relationships in the neighborhoods, with which they are already familiar. The facilitators possess a wealth of experience, knowledge and credibility to build trust with the young people on the streets. They are qualified by virtue of the changes made in their lives, the training received from the MPS degree program and Amer-I-Can, and by virtue of their prison experience.

In this connection, the referrals from the school district, juvenile justice and other resources will be important. Relationships need to be established in the street, without influence from juvenile justice and other sources, in order to build trust. Furthermore, the project intends to intervene on the front end, before a youngster has come to the attention of the juvenile justice system. However, the relationships created by the Facilitators will be augmented by referrals from juvenile justice, the school district and other sources.<sup>10</sup>

Every facilitator speaks of reluctance on the part of the youth to engage with them—they are suspicious of the facilitator’s arrival in their community and question their interest in their lives. Yet all have made that leap—one of the strengths of the program is the developing relationship between facilitators and youth. Their ability to enter the lives of these young people has taken many forms—from pick-up basketball games to attending court hearings, from birthday celebrations to helping them challenge addictions—and has proven key to their success thus far.

Julio Medina, facilitator at the Church of the Living Hope in Harlem, notes the skepticism he met with from gang leaders while trying to impress on them the significance of their presence on the program. Javan Higgins of the Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church sought out older gang members as entree to the Brevoort Projects—gang

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 6.

members who distrusted him initially but who were soon playing chess with him on Friday evenings. John Meatley of the Flatbush Reformed Church utilized the church basketball court to develop a bond and a trust among the registrants who at first saw him as representing “just another fly by night program trying to establish itself in their community with their own agenda.”<sup>11</sup>

As a result of the challenges of being a new program in an unfamiliar area — the difficulty in developing referrals, and the considerable amount of time spent in earning the trust of the local young people — the number of youth served by September 1999 was lower than had been anticipated in the planning stage. The original commitment to serve one hundred high-risk youth at six sites was finally met at the end of February 2000 and increasingly the sites were reaching a group of seriously high-risk youth, largely as a result of the growing relationships between facilitators and youth. The young people who were served complained that the name of the program, “At-Risk Youth Intervention Project: Community Services for Children,” was a negative, stigmatizing stereotype. Moreover, they argued that since they were turning their lives around, making a “U-turn” in a positive way, the program should be renamed “Uth Turn”—to signify youth turning their lives around.

Joining the ten facilitators at the sites were twelve interns, students of the NYTS Master of Divinity Program chosen by the Field Placement Office as part of their degree requirements. The interns work with the pastors and congregations in the program and must develop a close working relationship with the resident Facilitator. The facilitator is required to coordinate projects and activities with the intern; debrief on programs, problems and possibilities; and provide written feedback to both the student and school

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<sup>11</sup> FCLD, *Youth Turn*, 4.

on the intern's progress and participation. The interns are trained by Amer-I-Can and can draw on the same resources as the facilitators. "There is prophetic, spiritual meaning in each...selected to be one of the twelve chosen to minister to the marginalized. You have been called to use your extraordinary gifts and talents to advocate for young people. Our prayer is that we will be led by the Holy Spirit in this innovative project, to remove our youth from risk and restore and enable them to empower themselves to become agents of transformation and hope."<sup>12</sup>

During the pilot phase of the project, NYTS offered a seminar course "Theology of Urban Youth Ministry and Theological Reflection." This was a required course for all student interns involved in the project, and was taught by Rev. Dr. Hillary Gaston. It was held at a different one of the ten sites each week in order to provide interns with a better understanding of the range of facilities, environments and settings in which ministry was carried out. The course was developed to help the interns explore various aspects and methodologies of engaging in Metropolitan (Urban) Youth Ministry to at-risk and inner city youth in a non-traditional setting. Particular attention was given to the theological underpinnings on ministering to metropolitan youth whose backgrounds and lifestyles cover a variety of social, economic and religious traditions. Among the requirements was an end of term "Youth Advocacy" paper. One of the interns, Joseph Bragg, made his final presentation and paper, from which the following is taken:

The Youth Intervention Project created by NYTS is designed to reach these young people, who are struggling with the notion to leave the gang environment for a better life. The Gang involvement is serious. We have members in our program from the Bloods, the Latin Kings, and the Netas, these are major groups. The young people join gangs because they have been left out. Rejected by their parents and they are looking for love, security and family...

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<sup>12</sup> NYTS, *Demonstration Ministry Project*, 41.



The Metropolitan youth Ministry a product of the Youth Intervention Project is the wave of the future. It is nontraditional. The Metropolitan Youth Minister will be on the firing line. He or she will be in the streets where the young people are. Serving their needs. This non-traditional Ministry is different and more effective than your regular Ministry. That's why we need it. The Urban Minister must adapt to the circumstances in order to gain the trust and confidence from the young people...

Most academic and trade schools turn their backs on young people who may be involved with gangs. The Youth Intervention Project created by the NYTS greets these troubled young people with open arms. When they are kicked out of parochial schools for being a member of a gang we take them in. Listen to what they have to say. And take action...A few days ago, Anthony a 17-year old bright young man and his mother came to our Wednesday night meeting at Mt. Calvary Baptist Church in Harlem. He told us that he was kicked out of parochial school [for] being a member of the Latin Kings...and that he wanted to leave Alfred E. Smith High School in the South Bronx, because there is too much violence.

He told me he wanted to be an electrician. And that he wanted to earn his GED diploma. So I checked around and found the East Harlem Alternative... This school has a good track record. The classes are small only 25 students to a class. We made an appointment to see the principal Jeff Rifkin on January 28, 2000. The meeting was productive. The young man was accepted...When he told the principal at the Alternative School that he was involved in a gang. The principal had second thoughts about admitting him. But after I finished telling him about the Youth Intervention Project at NYTS he changed his tune. And told us about some fine choices. A Technical High School where Anthony can learn all about electronics. He would be allowed to leave the Alternative High school at noon for those studies. And they have a work-study program. Anthony can work a week and study a week...When I was about to leave the principal asked if he could send some of his young people to us who are gang members. I said yes indeed. Our arms are wide open to these young people. (See Appendix 3.)

The interns as a whole relied on their flexibility and determination to advocate for the youth in their program, having grown from their experiences and shared learning.

Their conclusions required the interns to delve into both the personal and theological basis for their work—conclusions both difficult and rewarding.

## **The Development of a Youth Friendly, Youth Focused Curriculum**

The original ARYIP proposal lists Jim Brown's Amer-I-Can intervention program as one of the five components of the intervention plan. "Jim Brown's Amer-I-Can program, an intervention curriculum used successfully across the country with youth at risk, gang members and in schools, the facilitators will be trained by Amer-I-Can and will also access other methodologies to support their work." Moreover, the Youth Turn Project Narrative provides a detailed summary of the Amer-I-Can training and curriculum:

AMER-I-CAN is Jim Brown's intervention program developed to address the needs of gang members, at-risk youth and inmates. The AMER-I-CAN curriculum was selected based on its proven record of success in engaging thousands of at-risk youth, gang members and inmates—starting on the west coast and moving across the country. The I-CAN Program (I Can + Responsibility=Self-Determination) teaches life management skills including self-determination techniques, motivating participants to define and fulfill personal goals. AMER-I-CAN has helped to ensure the successful replication of its program through the development of services and materials—a "train the trainers" course, ongoing technical assistance, facilitator training manual, audio cassette demonstration tapes for training purposes, a 78-page curriculum manual for youth participants and audio cassette tapes for recorded lessons...that cover eight critical areas:

1. motivation, habits, attitudes and conditioning
2. goal setting
3. problem solving and decision-making
4. emotional control
5. family relationships
6. financial stability
7. effective communications
8. job search and retention

ARYIP used the Amer-I-Can curriculum for the pilot phase (1999-2000) and discontinued its usage after that. I learned several lessons during this period relating to the curriculum. The Amer-I-Can curriculum was not effective with at-risk youth who were not mandated or required to attend the ARYIP program—they could either choose

to attend or not at their own volition. The curriculum was not contemporary or “youth friendly”—using dated references to Sammy Davis, Jr. and Bob Hope, for example. The Amer-I-Can curriculum manuals and training was expensive—costing \$350,000, or fifty percent of our grant from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. The Amer-I-Can trainers, who were formerly incarcerated, had neither the educational nor demonstrated leadership talents of our NYTS M.P.S. facilitators. The narrative pilot summary offers a critique:

[t]he Amer-I-Can curriculum is not entirely effective with this population. In part, the challenge is that all youth do not attend consecutive sessions as originally planned. These time frames have been extended at the sites. Both the Facilitators and interns state that the language in the curriculum is too abstract and it is challenging to keep the youth interested in the exercises. The curriculum is not well suited to groups of mixed-gender and mixed-ethnicity and NYTS is taking steps to get help adapting the curriculum. Lastly, we have identified that one limitation is that the Amer-I-Can curriculum does not allow us to fully engage the vast resources and skills of the Facilitators.

The Facilitators and interns have been able to use the AIC curriculum creatively—despite what they have found to be the limitations of the curriculum for use with this population of young people. The curriculum has been augmented by the Facilitators’ and interns’ ability to bring their own personal strengths and past experiences to the table; drawing on materials they developed in previous group facilitation work, their musical talents, professional skills (job development, legal advocacy, drug counseling) and contacts in the neighborhood. The breadth and depth of experiences, education and training that the Facilitators and interns bring to the program is enormous.<sup>13</sup>

One of the significant contributions that our Uth Turn participants have made to the program is the development of a curriculum that is youth-friendly and youth-focused. When we started Uth Turn in 1999 the curriculum in use was the above-mentioned Amer-I-Can program. The Facilitators, interns, and I found the curriculum to be neither youth-

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<sup>13</sup> FCLD, *Youth Turn*, 2-3.

nor user-friendly. Consequently, after the first year of the demonstration phase of this project, we decided to discontinue using the Amer-I-Can curriculum. We replaced it with our “Uth Turn “ Curriculum that the facilitators use at our church sites. The curriculum is comprised of seven modules, which include:

1. Positive self-view
2. Internal locus of control
3. Future orientation
4. Coping skills
5. Conflict resolution
6. Positive peer interaction
7. Community responsibility

The Uth Turn curriculum is a vital part of the services we provide our at-risk youth. Since 2003 the Uth Turn curriculum has been included as a key program component in our contract with our primary funder, the New York State Office of Children & Family Services.

I conducted two youth and renewal workshops at Medgar Evers College, The City University of New York Center for Religious Studies on November 16 and 30, 2000. Each three-hour workshop consisted of a lecture, questions and answers, group discussions, and the distribution of informational packets concerning the genesis and growth of Project Uth Turn. The primary focus was the changing role of religious institutions in alliance with government, foundations, business and other community service organizations, in aiding high-risk inner city youth combat the dangers they face.

The epidemic of incarceration affecting urban—largely minority—youth, its effects on their neighborhoods, and possible solutions to this problem was at the core of the workshops. “Never before have so many Americans—roughly 14 million—faced the likelihood of imprisonment at some point in their lives. Some 2 million are currently

behind bars. Due to sentencing reforms and stiffened criminal penalties (especially for drug abuse), more people than ever are serving longer terms.”<sup>14</sup> With such large numbers involved, recidivism so high, and economic opportunity so limited, neighborhoods can do little to remain unaffected by this issue. Dina Rose, a sociologist at CUNY’s John Jay College fears that in “high-crime communities that are socially isolated and racially segregated...locking up ever more people may be so damaging to neighborhood social cohesion that it destabilizes the very areas it is supposed to make safe...[Rose] finds the implications troubling for a society that tends to believe tough policies alone can win the war on crime.”<sup>15</sup>

One of Uth Turns partners is working to stem the destabilizing effects of prison on the community. COMALERT (Community and Law Enforcement Resources Together) was proposed by the Brooklyn District Attorney’s office after noting the anomaly of rising crime rates in certain neighborhoods even though it was falling borough-wide. (Gang activity and the re-entry of ex-convicts into neighborhoods were deemed the major factors for the rise in rates.) Teaming up with social-service providers to help these individuals—through job counseling and help with drug addiction—to reintegrate with their neighborhoods was hoped to lower the recidivism rate and help stabilize high-crime neighborhoods.

While virtually everyone agrees that the problem needs addressing, there is some debate still as to *who* should be addressing it. John DiIulio, a University of Pennsylvania political scientist (later George Bush’s Director of Faith-based Initiatives) argues that inner-city churches are the primary and natural institutions with which to start addressing

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<sup>14</sup> Ellis Cose, “America’s Prison Generation,” *Newsweek*, November 13, 2000, 42.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

the problems of urban crime and at-risk youth. He “vigorously opposed the 1996 welfare reform bill, [but] was a strong advocate for ‘charitable choice,’ the provision allowing government agencies to work with religious institutions providing services like drug rehabilitation or after-school tutoring. He wants to break down the bias against government’s funding of church programs...In many blighted neighborhoods...churches are the only positive institutions left...Nobody and nothing else, he believes—no welfare reform, no drug policy, no free-enterprise zones or school reforms, no Marshall Plan for the ghetto—can do what faith-based ministries are already doing and can do with more resources.”<sup>16</sup> I addressed this issue during the Fall 2000 term by teaching a course entitled “Administering Charitable Choice.” The semester explored the various approaches and limitations to accepting state funding by religious institutions by visiting the issue involving morality, ideology, race, and class.<sup>17</sup>

The Uth Turn Projects continued to grow, adding three more sites to the original ten: Parkchester Baptist Church in the Bronx; Prospect-Lefferts Neighborhood Association in Brooklyn; and the Korean Youth Center of New York in Flushing, Queens.

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<sup>16</sup> Tim Stafford, “The Criminologist Who Discovered Churches,” *Christianity Today*, June 14, 1999, 38.

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix 13.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Uth Turn's Collaboration With Other Organizations**

I first met Brooklyn District Attorney Charles J. Hynes in 1986 when then-Governor Mario Cuomo appointed Mr. Hynes the Special Prosecutor in the racially motivated killing of Michael Griffith, commonly referred to as the “Howard Beach Case.” Mr. Hynes’ successful prosecution of the perpetrators in the case marked a turning point in racially motivated criminal cases in New York City. We have maintained a close relationship over the ensuing years. District Attorney Hynes initiated a re-entry program—ComALERT—in the fall of 1999 and New York Theological Seminary and Uth Turn became two of the first community-based organizations to collaborate with and join ComALERT—Community and Law Enforcement Resources Together.

ComALERT emphasizes *preventing* violence over enforcement, prosecution and incarceration alone. It reflects the belief that we can no longer just ‘imprison our way out’ of our violent crime problem. We must also offer services to break the cycle of recidivism and serve a larger social goal of reducing inequities in economic opportunities through educational and employment programs. (See Appendix 4.)

The return of parolees and probationers to their neighborhoods occurs frequently without the individuals having had any opportunity to improve their lives. Their time in prison rarely includes any educational or rehabilitative activities. Most of the returnees have not completed high school, frequently have substance abuse problems, and lack a full-time work history. These areas must be addressed in order to avoid re-arrest,

maintain stability in their lives, and become productive. Uth Turn's program is designed precisely to complement this program's aims—mentoring and life skills services for at-risk young people. The Facilitators are integral to such an effort—their background gives them first-hand knowledge of the obstacles facing the newly released. District Attorney Hynes' office has been a consistent advocate and supporter of Uth Turn since 1999 and wrote a letter of support to then Governor Eliot Spitzer urging the renewal of our contract by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

I have worked with New York City Human Rights Commissioner Patricia Gatling since she was an assistant to Special Prosecutor Charles Hynes. Ms. Gatling served for several years as Deputy District Attorney in Brooklyn and was appointed Director of ComALERT, where she worked in close collaboration with NYTS and Uth Turn. Ms. Gatling was appointed Human Rights Commissioner in 2004; and I have continued this collaborative, professional relationship—participating with the CCHR at conferences at the Schomburg Center concerning ethnic diversity, the “racial achievement gap,” and participated in an Oral History Documentation Project.

### **Uth Turn Support for Re-entry Projects for the Formerly Incarcerated**

FCLD/Uth Turn's organizational support for re-entry projects for the formerly incarcerated is a natural outgrowth of the fact that Uth Turn facilitators are graduates of New York Theological Seminary's Master of Professional Studies Program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility, which it has operated since 1982. Our Uth Turn facilitators have faced some of the same challenges as our at-risk youth. Moreover, our facilitators who were once at-risk youths themselves and who have turned their own lives around are



proven, effective resources that can help young people resist criminality, drug use and academic under-performance.

Julio Medina, an M.P.S. graduate, began working with Uth Turn as one of our original facilitators in the spring of 1999. His church site was the Church of the Living Hope in East Harlem where he worked until 2003. For the past nine years Mr. Medina has been the Executive Director of the Exodus Transitional Community, a re-entry project he founded. The program provides one-on-one life coaching and developmental workshops designed to aid the participants in gaining employment, restoring family relationships, develop effective problem solving and adopt behaviors conducive to successful transition. According to Mr. Medina:

What Exodus is, is a non-for-profit, faith based organization that works with women and men being released from prison. We are in East Harlem. We service, thus far, over 5,000 people. Statistics have proved that we have reduced the rate of recidivism—meaning the rate of people going back to prison—by half of the National Bureau of Justice statistics. So we are doing some effective work and we're doing it because we know, the staff knows. The majority of the staff has been incarcerated. We look at the problems so differently. We realize that it's an opportunity for so many of the men and women that are getting out to stay out. But they need a place to come to talk about that. Exodus was that place.<sup>18</sup>

President George W. Bush cited the Exodus Transitional Community in his 2004 State of the Union Address as the model re-entry project in the United States. Mr. Medina is also featured in a PBS documentary that examines the trailblazing work of the Exodus Transitional Community.

Mr. Medina and I participated in a conference sponsored by the New York Theological Seminary, Auburn Theological Seminary, and Union Theological Seminary

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<sup>18</sup> Julio Medina, "Welcoming the Prisoner," *30 Good Minutes*, <http://www.csec.org/csec/sermon/Medina> (accessed January 8, 2009).

entitled “Becoming the Promised Land: Faith, Community, and the Prison Re-Entry Population.” The New York Theological Seminary spirit permeated and transformed this conference—we all acknowledged and paid tribute to the twenty-six year history of NYTS and its work with the M.P.S. program at Sing Sing and the prison re-entry population. It was also gratifying to witness the tremendous progress made in how the faith community responds to the formerly incarcerated since Uth Turn started in 1999. Initially, concerns were raised that church members would resist both the M.P.S. graduates *and* at-risk youth who were not church members. As Uth Turn approaches its tenth anniversary, the reception to both the graduates and the Uth Turn participants has been overwhelmingly positive.

New York Theological Seminary, in our M.P.S. program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility, has done in practice what Jesus preached in his inaugural sermon in the Gospel of Luke 4:16-21 proclaiming “release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.” (Luke 4:18)<sup>19</sup> The transformative nature of the “captive freeing” work of the past twenty-six years is eloquently articulated by the NYTS Sower Award winner and M.P.S. commencement speaker, Jim Wallis:

I have often told the story of the first time I visited this unusual and inspiring program at Sing Sing. The students were reading my book, *The Soul of Politics*, as part of their seminary curriculum, and I received a letter from the prison inmates themselves, inviting me to meet with them and discuss my book. It sounded interesting, so I wrote back to ask when they would like me to come. A young man wrote to me on behalf of his fellow Sing Sing students saying, “Well, we’re free most nights!” He went on, “We’re kind of a captive audience here!” The prison authorities were very accommodating and I got to spend several hours with about 70 guys in a crowded room deep in the bowels of the infamous penal institution.

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<sup>19</sup> All biblical quotes from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

The animated book conversation was one of the most stimulating and rigorous of any I've ever had. I vividly remember much of the discussion, and especially the riveting comment of one young man who said to me, "Jim, most of us at Sing Sing come from just about four or five neighborhoods in New York City. It's like a train. You get on the train in my neighborhood when you are nine or ten years old, and the train ends up here at Sing Sing." But this young man had experienced a spiritual conversion inside of that prison, and was now enrolled in the New York Theological Seminary program training pastors to work inside the prison system and to go back and work in those neighborhoods from which they had come...

These are very special graduates. To get to where they were last Wednesday night, twelve men had to overcome so many obstacles. I told them, in my commencement address, that they "had an advantage." The advantage they have is in knowing what faith really means, how much it costs, and how it can completely change your life and the world. They know that faith is for the big stuff. And they know that if you have faith, even the size of a grain of mustard seed, you can move mountains. And that's what these men had to move to get to this place on a warm Wednesday night in the visitors room inside Sing Sing prison... It was a night of rich gratitude and profound hope. And while I have often been inspired by the faces of the bright young graduates facing me on brilliant spring days of school commencements, I have never felt more grateful and more hopeful than I did looking into the spiritually-chiseled faces of those redeemed graduates on a summer's night at Sing Sing prison. Thanks be to God.<sup>20</sup>

The thousands of at-risk youth whom Uth Turn have served since 1998 have all been the beneficiaries of the extraordinary, transformative work of our NYTS M.P.S. graduates who are Uth Turn facilitators. These M.P.S. graduates are successful with at-risk youth precisely because of their belief that "no one is beyond redemption."

On September 17, 2007 Brooklyn District Attorney Charles J. Hynes held the second ComALERT Prisoner Re-entry Conference at which I served as moderator on a panel entitled, "Harnessing Spirituality to Enhance Re-entry." The panelists included the Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood, Dr. Jonas Waizer, Iman Umar Abdul-Jalil, Dennis Bassat,

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<sup>20</sup> Jim Wallis, *Seminary at Sing Sing*, <http://blog.beliefnet.com/godspolitics/2008/06/graduating-from-sing-sing> (accessed January 8, 2009).

and Mika'il DeVaux. Several hundred people attended the conference and New York Lieutenant Governor (now Governor) David A. Paterson delivered the keynote address.

It is my contention that the key to successful re-entry is to reinstitute educational programs in correctional facilities. In support of this argument I would offer twenty-six years of success stories of the M.P.S. program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility under the direction of NYTS Professor Dr. Edward L. Hunt. Moreover, it is my position that New York State should *fund* the NYTS program and promote it as a model educational program that should be replicated throughout the United States. Doing so would have a dramatic, positive effect on rehabilitation, reduce recidivism and increase public safety.

## **Chapter Three**

### **2002-2003 The Year of Transition**

In 2002 New York Theological Seminary, the Fund for Community Leadership Development, Inc. and Uth Turn relocated our administrative offices from 5 West 29 Street in Manhattan to new offices at 475 Riverside Drive, Suite 500, at the Interchurch Center. The move is an exciting one in that it expands the academic and theological opportunities of our students by virtue of proximity to Columbia University, Barnard College, City College, Teachers College, The Auburn Seminary, Union Theological Seminary, and Jewish Theological Seminary. Further, the Interchurch Center itself houses many faith-based education and not-for-profit agencies that share our vision of service. Our interns are now located near seven of our thirteen Uth Turn neighborhood sites.

The Ford Foundation awarded a \$1,000,000 grant to New York Theological Seminary to support the Youth Turn At-Risk Youth Intervention Project. The grant spanned a four-year period from 1999-2003. In October 2002 I submitted a report to the Ford Foundation grants administrator Ms. Sharon Ebron. The report lays out the project's impact on the New York Theological Seminary in terms of theological education, relationships with faith-based partners, and the changing paradigm of youth ministry. The report states that

[T]he goal of this program is to support urban youth by leveraging all of the community's assets—the church, families, neighbors, youth-serving

organizations, schools, and the criminal justice system—to overcome poverty and injustice and promote social change. By engaging NYTS faculty, graduate students, pastors and congregations at our member churches, we are devising strategies to reach chronically disadvantaged young people of color in New York City.<sup>21</sup> (See Appendix 5.)

The program has been successful in its pilot phase and we have plans to expand both the number of sites and the number of youth served. By September 2002, Youth Turn will be operating in all five boroughs with thirteen site locations—five in Upper Manhattan, four in Brooklyn, two in the Bronx, and one each in Queens and Staten Island.

### **Project Impact on the Seminary, Theological Education and Faith-Based Partners**

The project has had a deep impact on the New York Theological Seminary, the course of its theological education, its faith-based partners, and the young people and their families being served. Each site has its own facilitator—a graduate of NYTS M.P.S. program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. One indication of our success has been that the majority of facilitators who have remained with the Youth Turn program from its inception in 1999. Six of the original ten facilitators are still working with Youth Turn and their commitment is beyond measure. Three of these facilitators have entered the Masters of Divinity Program at the Seminary—Darren Ferguson and Julio Medina enrolled in the Fall 2002, and Willis Steele graduated in May 2002. Virtually all of our facilitators have been able to make the transition from prison to work.

The impact of the Youth Turn program on our graduate students likewise has been profound. Their involvement in Youth Turn has promoted “a new understanding of youth ministry—a new appreciation of the importance of nurturing partnerships that help

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<sup>21</sup> New York Theological Seminary, *Report to the Ford Foundation on Youth Turn*, October 2, 2002, 1.

young people and their families succeed. The curriculum and field experience provided by the Seminary to our future graduates have increased their knowledge and ability to work with gang members and other inner-city at-risk youth. To date the project has directly impacted 33 graduate students who have entered the program.”<sup>22</sup> In the 2001-2002 academic year, twelve graduate students were placed in faith-based sites. All of the interns were women of color, multi-ethnic, representing various faith traditions; largely working in related fields during the day, they attended NYTS courses at night, while interning for Youth Turn. They bring with them vital skills that are used for youth advocacy with government agencies, schools, counselors, law enforcement, business, and individuals, while assisting with referrals, organizing, mentoring and education. Each NYTS intern dedicates twenty hours each week to the project—fifteen hours of cooperative and collaborative work with the facilitator, three hours working with the pastor, and the remainder enrolled in a yearlong course “Theology and Urban Youth Ministry.” (See Appendix 13)

This interdisciplinary and collaborative approach has led to a deeper understanding of urban theological education and how faith-based institutions can serve as an even more powerful force in the lives of young people with the depth and strength of their resources. The impact of their work is summed up by intern Debra Sanders, “as future leaders we have to begin to reach out and take a hold of our young people more than ever in order to make certain that they are not going in the wrong direction of life. [Urban Youth Ministers must provide] a response of how we can assist our young black men from becoming subjects of the streets, gang membership and/or violence, or incarceration. The response is that, the Elders must do a much more thorough [sic] and complete job of dispelling the myth that Black and Latinos end up in prison.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>23</sup> NYTS, *Report to the Ford Foundation*, 3.

With the end of their year-long internship, all the graduate students maintain that the Youth Turn experience has changed their view of urban ministry, including a higher comfort level of working with young people. The 2001-2002 interns have volunteered to serve as an advisory committee for the group of interns to follow in the 2002-2003 academic year.

The project would never have succeeded without the collaboration of our faith-based institutions, social service providers and law-enforcement agencies—all of whom have had an impact on the program and on each other. Congregations and their pastors have provided the space for meetings, provided basic needs such as food and clothing, supported the program with their own resources, and have joined the facilitators and interns as adult mentors. Two of our facilitators have been named Youth Ministers at their project sites—Willis Steele is Minister of Children and Youth at Memorial Baptist Church and Darren Ferguson is Youth Minister at Abyssinian Baptist Church. These men have gone from ex-offender to facilitator to Youth Minister at their churches with the enthusiastic support and love of their congregations. Both have had success at their faith-based site—but other young people watching from outside have wanted to become involved too. The presence of Youth Turn at their churches has produced a greater understanding of the needs of the marginalized young and encouraged new approaches to young people in general. There has also been an increase in faith-based institutions being approached by secular organizations hoping to form a partnership to serve local youth. Further, there is a marked increase by law enforcement personnel—particularly police, parole and youth officers—in coming to view faith-based institutions as legitimate partners in reducing neighborhood crime.



## **Project Impact on Young People and Their Families**

In 2001-2002, participants in the project engaged young people in their neighborhoods with three objectives: to recruit young people in their community for the Youth Turn program; establish links within the community to serve the needs of these young people; and to minimize the young people's contact with law enforcement. The Facilitators engaged in wide-ranging efforts at street-based outreach. "Many young people were joining group sessions as a result of referrals from current participants; they invite their siblings, relatives and friends to check out the program. Youth Turn also received referrals from parents, youth officers, school personnel, the courts, and increasingly other youth-serving agencies."<sup>24</sup>

During the past year Youth Turn has participated in youth forums, conferences workshops, panels and graduation ceremonies—all events that result in publicizing our program and providing referrals. On May 4, 2002 we held our own annual conference; a Youth Congress entitled "Making Meaning Out of Madness." Facilitators and young people from all thirteen sites participated, as did former gang members and other at-risk youth. It was an opportunity for young people to participate in workshops and interact with other young people. The conference included Opening and Closing Plenaries, ten youth workshops, and three adult workshops. The ten youth workshops were the following:

- Making Choices: Becoming a Youth Leader
- Where are You, God? Questions About Suffering
- Finding Your Voice: Creative Ways to Express Yourself
- The Last Beat Down: Violence in Pop Culture
- Respect Mine: The Beauty of Beliefs
- D.R.A.M.A.—Dare Recognize All My Abilities

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<sup>24</sup> NYTS, *Report to the Ford Foundation*, 5.

- Healing Thru Art: A Vehicle for Expression
- Looks are Deceiving: Don't Judge Me By What You See
- Who's Calling the Shots? Take Charge of Your Life
- How Can I Make A Difference: Changing the System from the Inside Out

Adults attended workshops including “Revisiting Your Youth: Sharing Your Story,” “Reading the Signs: How to Identify Youth in Crisis,” and “Bridging the Gap: How to Support Young People in Crisis.”<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the year, Youth Turn has continued to develop its relationship with law enforcement in order to both recruit young people into the program, and to serve as advocates for them. Our facilitators have developed working relationships with local precincts; court personnel including judges, advocates and case managers; and district attorneys' offices including gang units, probation officers and community affairs offices. Youth Turn is also a strong partner and proponent of the ComALERT public safety program which supports re-entry to their communities to those on parole or probation. Further, in an effort to minimize their contacts with law enforcement, Youth Turn provides group sessions, counseling and case management, and advocacy. Group sessions are held twice weekly where the objective is to

[p]rovide them with critical thinking skills so when they are faced with tough circumstances they can make the right choices...The Objective is for these young men and women to make informed choices by understanding the consequences that go along with the action they have taken. Scare tactics and challenging them to ‘fight’ is not a productive formula toward the empowerment process. By fight I mean challenging their manhood or what they believe in. Being a facilitator for over three years with the Uth Turn project, as well as having a lifetime of experience it is clear that negative challenges just don't work! By empowering them to make informed choices they become owners of their destiny. They realize that they play a significant role in which they grow daily. They begin to see

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<sup>25</sup> NYTS, *Report to the Ford Foundation*, 6.

the value of life outside the family, which they have interpreted as their gang.<sup>26</sup>

In all of the sites, facilitators have helped young people stay in school, enroll in GED programs, locate housing, serve as advocates for court-refereed youth, obtain jobs, and provide family counseling. The number of young people staying out of trouble with law enforcement, remaining in school, and finding and keeping jobs, is the true measure of our success. Some sites are exploring ways to continue ongoing support for those youth who have successfully completed the program and using them as peer role models for current participants.

### **Program Challenges and Plans**

Since the project's inception in 1999, the Ford Foundation (three grants totaling \$1,000,000) and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (\$700,000 for a one-year period) have supported Youth Turn. We had a \$105,000 balance on NYOCFS contract at the end of the year—which we were eventually able to apply towards the Facilitators salaries. We had anticipated an extension of this contract, but it was not the case. During this period the Seminary continued to operate the program while it negotiated with the state. The only expenses paid during this period were salaries. We finally resolved the issue with the state and were awarded \$932,000—the full amount of our request, which may be renewed up to four additional years.

In October 2003 Uth Turn evaluator, Dr. John Cardwell submitted a program evaluation report covering the period 1999-2003. Dr. Cardwell writes:

EVAXX, third-party evaluation specialists, used a case study approach to assess this FCLD UTH TURN initiative. Evaluators analyzed file documents and interviewed and surveyed program managers, and front-

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<sup>26</sup> NYTS, *Report to the Ford Foundation*, 7.

line staff comprised of site outreach coordinators and facilitators. The evaluation assessed and documented the UTH TURN mission, timetable, operations, outputs and outcomes. It focused on these program components: (a) receiving referrals and recruiting at-risk young people, (b) minimizing youth contact with the criminal justice system, and (c) mobilizing community and neighborhood resources on behalf of young people. Additionally, the evaluator reviewed the UTH TURN legal structure, its leadership, staffing, resources, evaluation procedures, and finances. Finally, the evaluation addressed UTH TURN administrative processes, communications, strategic position, and its process of collaboration.<sup>27</sup> (See Appendix 6.)

The Evaluation Report concluded that UTH TURN represents a cost-effective alternative to the criminal justice system for at-risk young people. The Fund for Community Leadership and Development served as contractor for the New York State Office of Children and Family Services-funded initiative. Spending approximately \$2,000 a year per young person over a nearly 60-month period, UTH TURN built an administrative infrastructure, coordinated thirteen faith-based sites, and collaborated with scores of organizations and faith-based organizations, while serving approximately 1,500 young people. The targeted group is between 13 and 21 years old and requires self-development in order to minimize contact with the criminal justice system. The neighborhoods served by UTH TURN fail to provide adequate social structure, activities and relationships. As a result, the youth often appear without adequate internal values, beliefs and skills.

Most facilitators report that more than 90% of their clients are less than 18 years old; most lived near or below the poverty rate; and all sites had minority populations—predominantly African American, a couple Latino, and at least one primarily Korean. Most were attending school, some working in dead-end jobs or part-time. More than half

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<sup>27</sup> John Cardwell, *UTH TURN Final Program Evaluation Report*, October 30, 2003, i.

of the clients received support services (counseling, school assistance, vocational training, e.g.); about half were still active at the end of the year; and eight out ten of those who had been court-involved did not return to the criminal justice system. Of the 1,500 young people referred to UTH TURN over a five-year period were referred by courts, schools or parents. Many who participated in UTH TURN would have otherwise been under the control of the criminal justice system. The cost of UTH TURN was approximately \$2,000 per individual per year. Contrast that with the approximate \$40,000 to \$100,000 cost per individual per year in state and privately funded institutions. Thus, the potential cost saving for each young person served is extraordinary.

This evaluation concluded that UTH TURN had many successes, challenges and opportunities. Facilitators and interns feel the most successful aspect is its capacity to reduce or minimize contact with law enforcement—that they have a unique ability to mobilize court-involved youth and expose them to available resources through a citywide network and churches. Key strengths included mentoring, thinking “outside the box,” establishing community linkages; and finally, building a sustainable coalition and finding jobs for the young people.

UTH TURN is challenged to continually recognize what is *actually* going on with the youth and then serving them based on that need. Facilitators and interns recognize an urgent need to develop a core series of UTH TURN workshops. They also saw a need for developing a case management and reporting system to facilitate the flow of information between themselves and the referring agencies.

Recommendations were also made during the evaluation process. Among them are the following:

- Poise to go forward from the current transition period
- Build the UTH TURN model from lessons learned
- Take advantage of the automatic respect young people have for the church
- Emphasize local church collaborations
- Hold more community events
- Promote the UTH TURN grassroots approach to intervening with court-involved young people
- Conduct regular staff development
- Provide health benefits to staff

Finally, the evaluation concluded that:

Steeped in the New York Theological Seminary “Sociology of Community-Based Reconciliation” and driven by its Master in Professional Studies (MPS) graduates from the Sing Sing Correctional Facility, the UTH TURN project is fashioning an innovative approach to youth development. This UTH TURN faith-based human development strategy deploys MPS graduates and the physical facilities of local faith-based organizations. The initiative clearly is capable of (a) improving the quality of goods and services available to at-risk youth, (b) reducing recidivism and (c) making a positive change in the lives of targeted youth and in the lives of their families and communities.

The core curriculum being developed can be expertly packaged—in conjunction with innovative youth support activities—and used widely in New York City and beyond. For example, imaginative recruiting and referral mechanisms, creative tactics for minimizing contact with law enforcement, and inventive referral and follow-up arrangements are being tried and readied for cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit documentation.

The faith-based institutions and constituents have proved to be a safe haven for UTH TURN program development. The idea that stronger longer-lasting impact can be on spirituality is ready for replication and rigorous evaluation and demonstration on a large scale.<sup>28</sup>

It is my belief that not only has Uth Turn changed the paradigm of youth ministry, but also that Uth Turn is contributing to a shift in public policy from incarceration to

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<sup>28</sup> Cardwell, 17.

prevention. In our Uth Turn 1999-2004 status report for the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, it was stated that Uth Turn was in a strategic position to provide preventive intervention to those youth who require it. Isolated in high-need communities, Uth Turn youth are at risk of further abuse and of becoming persons in need of supervision and of being charged with committing a crime; and as such, these youth are candidates for incarceration, parole and probation. Youth living in NYC's high-need communities are prime candidates for the criminal justice system, and, thus, these vulnerable individuals are in need of special intervention. "These neighborhoods are as segregated from the more affluent, white sections of metropolitan New York as any township in South Africa under apartheid. Living in such neighborhoods as southwest Yonkers, central and East Harlem, central Brooklyn and the South Bronx is assumed to predispose the poor to a number of social ills, including drug abuse, truancy and the persistent joblessness that draws people into a long cycle of crime and incarceration."<sup>29</sup>

2003 ended positively—the New York State Office of Children and Family Services extended Uth Turn's contract; we received support from Congressman Charles Rangel; and Uth Turn held a press conference with the New Jersey Attorney General Peter Harvey to announce the opening of our new site at the Bethany Baptist Church in Newark, New Jersey.

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<sup>29</sup> Helen Epstein, "Enough to Make You Sick," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 12, 2003, 75.

## **Chapter Four**

### **2004—Uth Turn Marks Its Fifth Year Serving At-Risk Youth**

On January 5, 2004 FCLD/Uth Turn prepared a comprehensive Progress Management Plan for our primary funder the New York State office of Children and Family Services. The Progress Management Plan focused on Uth Turn's priorities for 2004: personnel; programs; case-management system implementation; curriculum development; strategic partnerships and collaborations; and strategic planning. (See Appendix 7.) Significant advances have been made in the operations of Uth Turn. Restructuring will help us to serve more youth—doing so with improved quality and effectiveness.

#### **Personnel and Staff Development**

Uth Turn has experienced growth in both the number and quality of the staff. At present a total staff complement of twenty includes: five seminary interns; a senior facilitator/outreach coordinator; three full-time facilitators; five part-time facilitators; a special event and linkages coordinator; a grants manager and grants accountant; two administrative assistants; a director of youth development and program administrator; and a CEO. New hires and new positions can be found among the following personnel. Facilitator Namon Ates is now full-time and serving as supervisor and trainer of new facilitators. His full-time presence has greatly increased the quality of the program in Staten Island, improved relations with the site pastor, and allowed him to do more work



with the youth. We hope to have all facilitators work full-time, and also see the Supervisor/Trainer become a full-time position, not attached to a site, and devoted solely to the training and supervision of the facilitators, as this is a full-time responsibility. Rodney Johnson was hired for Special Events and Linkages Coordinator—to allow us to monitor and develop relationships and agreements with other organizations, and to hold events to bring together our church partners and others, so as to inform our work. Celena Green is the new grant manager; helping us to identify prospective funders, develop joint proposals, and clarify priorities in funding needs. Evaristo Melendez is a full-time Facilitator for the New Life Church; and Melvin Isaac, an MPS Graduate and accomplished artist, is a part-time facilitator at Abyssinian Baptist Church.

Great steps have been taken to increase the preparedness, professionalism, and capacity of our staff. This has been accomplished through orientation and training, as well as increased supervision and improved internal communications. Staff participates in workshops and special training designed to impart the skills and awareness needed to improve our service to youth, their families, and the community.

All new facilitators now spend the first two to four weeks in orientation and training with Namon Ates in Staten Island, before proceeding to their assigned site. Facilitators are being trained by David Rinaldi of the YMCA in the use of Development Assets. All facilitators are also being trained in the use of Social Solutions Case Management systems. This will allow for the recording of all information from the referral/intake forms, as well as youth participation and the demonstrated impact of these services. Facilitators have the Uth Turn Draft Curriculum and have begun testing it at their sites, improving attendance and interaction at Group Counseling Sessions. Further,

facilitators are also being trained in Independent Life Skills Youth Mentoring Curriculum, developed by NYS-OCFS, to assist youth who will be living independently, including those discharged from foster care.

### **Programs**

The programs of Uth Turn have been strengthened greatly with the larger staff, the staff development and training, the growing commitment of our host churches, linkages with other organizations, and the outreach and public speaking engagements that our facilitators engage in to raise awareness and support for our work.

Our newest site is the New Life Tabernacle in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. It is a full-time site enabling us to better serve the young people and their families in the area. It is the home church of Dr. Angela Moses, our Director of Youth Development; and the Pastor Bishop Eric Figueroa is deeply committed to having Uth Turn at his church and is involved in mentoring and guiding Evaristo Melendez, our facilitator. Many other churches have expressed interest in having Uth Turn, and an orientation package is being created to clearly state the responsibilities involved in hosting the program. It has always been our intention that the Uth Turn sites would be available to serve youth on a full-time basis—five to seven days per week. We have made progress this year with two more sites—First Baptist Church of Crown Heights, Brooklyn and Church alive Community Church in the Bronx—joining New Life and Mt. Sinai (Staten Island) as full-time sites.

Abyssinian Baptist Church has re-opened on a part-time basis with Melvin Isaac the site facilitator. He has begun actively recruiting youth with the assistance of the ministers, the congregation, and the community. He will also be collaborating with IS

172 to provide Uth Turn services in the school. The Korean Youth Center is conducting outreach to nearby high schools and schools in other areas, which are attended by youth from the community. Mt. Sinai United Christian Church is building a computer lab with the help of Teaming-4-Technology—a technical assistance program designed to help community-based programs use technology effectively.

Since the beginning of the year, Rodney Johnson has been making site visits and meeting with the pastors to hear their thoughts and concerns regarding the program. There were varying degrees of commitment and satisfaction with the program among the pastors and church administrators. The personnel and administrative changes that have been made are part of an ongoing effort to make Uth Turn a program that is owned and valued by the congregations and communities in which it operates.

### **Curriculum**

Uth Turn has developed a draft curriculum and has approached Teachers College to field-test and evaluate its usefulness. Topics covered in the curriculum include:

- Positive Self View: Media Literacy; Commitment to Learning from workshops
- Internal/External Locus of Control: Choices; Reflections
- Future Orientation: Love Ethic; Cause & Effect; Thoughts & Actions; Goal Setting & Visioning
- Coping Skills: Who Needs Me; Coping with Stress
- Conflict Resolution: Conflict Resolution Skills; To Fight or Not to Fight; Conflict Cycles; Think First
- Positive Peer Interaction: No Man is an Island; Relationship Skills; Asking for Support
- Community Responsibility: My Community; Community Workers; Participant Project

## **Strategic Partnerships and Collaborations**

Uth Turn develops linkages for several purposes—to gain referrals, extend services offered to youth, and to expand the reach and scope of the program. Referral linkages are those we establish to gain youth through regular and consistent referrals from partnering agencies. We have linkages with:

- ComAlert (Brooklyn D.A.)
- Legal Aid Society
- ACS/Neighborhood Networks
- Schools
- Brooklyn Family Court, Staten Island Family Court
- 120<sup>th</sup> Precinct (Staten Island)
- City of NY Law Dept/Family Court Division
- Jewish Board of Family & Children's Services
- Northern Manhattan Office of NYC County DA
- Alternatives to Detention
- NY Mission Society
- Binding Together
- Bronx Probation Intensive Supervision Program

With Youth Resource Linkages we connect with groups to provide services needed by our youth (frequently mandated by the courts) that Uth Turn does not offer in-house. Some of these linkages are:

- STEP
- CASES
- Job Corps
- Harlem Hospital Adolescents and Family Counseling Center
- Mental Health Network

We are also involved in building collaborative projects with a number of agencies in order to build complimentary program activities and develop cutting-edge programs that address the needs of youth holistically. Among them are:

**Developmental Assets Lab Pilot Program.** A collaboration between the YMCA of Greater New York and Uth Turn, the Developmental Assets Labs—a nationally recognized model for youth development—will assist in training in curricula, evaluation models, technical assistance, and inclusion in websites and newsletters, participation in symposia. This partnership will raise both the quality and visibility of our work.

**Urban Male Empowerment Project.** A collaboration between Medgar Evers College and Uth Turn, this project is designed to increase higher education attendance, retention, and graduation of urban males. It is widely recognized that while urban males need support to stay in college, they must first get to college, Uth Turn will serve as the pipeline—directing the young to challenging high schools and then to college, rather than to prison.

**Re-Entry Empowerment Program.** A collaboration between the Lighthouse Corporation, Exodus Transitional Community, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, the New York City Housing Authority, and Uth Turn—the project is designed to enable teen and adult ex-offenders to receive counseling and life-skills training. Upon completion they will be enrolled in an Emergency Medical Technician License Training Program—training to take place at both Uth Turn sites and NYCHA locations.

**After-Care Partnership Program.** A collaboration between NYC Administration for Children's Services and Uth Turn, designed to provide assistance to youth after being discharged from foster care. Included in such assistance would be housing placement, job placement, and counseling or support services during the transition to independent living.

**Mentoring Children Aging-out of Foster Care.** A collaboration between NYS Office of Children and Family Services, Big Brothers/Big Sisters of NY, and Uth Turn will provide mentoring and life-skills support to youth preparing to exit foster care. They have enlisted our support to reach out to churches to recruit mentors, specifically men of color, and to provide services to youth in the communities where they may reside.

Further collaborations are being developed with the National Basketball Players Association to engage ball players in reaching high-risk youth; NYC Dept of Education/Alternative High Schools to gain access to alternative schools which serve students in juvenile detention—our aim is to bring the Uth Turn curriculum to these schools to serve the youth and reduce recidivism; and the NYC Housing Authority to explore the possibility of bringing Uth Turn to community centers.

### **Fund Development, Financial Management and Public Relations**

Uth Turn was launched with the generous support of the Ford Foundation and grants from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services. After reviewing the programs, staff and resources needed to Uth Turn highly effective, we concluded that it would require a budget of approximately \$2.5 million per year. The 2004 operating budget was a meager \$700,000. The OCFS grant was set to expire in 2005. Research and contacting of funders was ongoing. Proposals were developed to describe program components in a manner specific to the funders of such programs.

Uth Turn sponsored a Clergy Breakfast in January to bring together our partners and solidify their support. Uth Turn was featured prominently on Q104.3 FM's Annual Fundraising, raised \$4,000, and garnered broad exposure. Dr. Moses was featured on a public television program, which generated many inquiries about Uth Turn. We are

exploring the development of an online newsletter and planning has begun for the First Annual Uth Turn Gala Fundraiser.

In July 2004 NYTS and FCLD/Uth Turn hosted the Pan-African seminar of religious scholars on religion and poverty, bringing together scholars and activists from around the world. In September, Uth Turn Facilitator Lance Cruell and his mentee, Jerrell Martin, were honored at Yankee Stadium for their Uth Turn Mentoring Program.

On November 29, 2004 Uth Turn submitted a proposal addendum to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services for future funding. The addendum presented statistics and other descriptive material focusing on recidivism rates for Uth Turn participants. It asked “[w]hat are the unique program features that make Uth Turn successful in keeping recidivism low?”<sup>30</sup> The cost savings to the state are large indeed.

Nearly 40 percent of the 777 Contract Year 2004 Uth Turn participants—308 young people—had had previous contact with the criminal justice system. Of these 308 individuals, only 9% or 28 individuals returned to the criminal justice system. Had 50% returned to the system (154 individuals), and 10% of them required a year of detention, the cost to government would have been \$1,275,000...Under this scenario, Uth Turn at a CY 2004 cost of \$700,000, would have paid for itself plus saved the government \$575,000. This projected cost savings does not take into account the benefit and money earned by the Uth Turn participants who got jobs and began paying taxes or the participants who volunteered community services, or entered a career pathway or those, at risk young people, who were prevented from entering the criminal justice system.<sup>31</sup>

Uth Turn accomplishes its mission through a three-pronged Program Service Model using individual reform, strong family relationships, and a community action framework. Participants are assisted in understanding that they must change their lives; establish a sense of purpose that gives them reasons to learn and go forward despite

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<sup>30</sup> C. Vernon Mason, *Uth Turn Proposal Addendum*, New York State Office of Children and Family Services, November 29, 2004, 3 (Appendix 8).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

crime, poverty, substance abuse and violence; and orient participants toward achieving success through incremental goals and objectives. Participants are reminded of the importance of establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and are provided with counseling, mediation, and effective communication tools to assist in building them. Lastly, Uth Turn participants are informed of the communities and the wider world in which they live—and urged to give back to the community.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, in 2004 we prepared a proposal for a one-year intensive intervention and prevention program for at-risk youth at a cost of \$100,000. The proposal summary reads as follows:

UTH TURN is an innovative youth intervention program that engages social service agencies, the criminal justice system, community leaders, faith-based institutions, schools, institutions of higher learning, and ex-offenders in a strategy to reconnect court adjudicated and high risk youth to the positive long-standing entities, values and opportunities that will help youth turn their lives around. Currently in 11 New York City “high need” neighborhoods, UTH TURN works with youth, UTH TURN works with youth ages 13-21 who are in the greatest need of intervention—teens with little or no parental supervision, gang members, truant youth, out-of-school youth, youth who have current or prior criminal cases, and youth “aging out” of Foster Care...

With funds requested, Uth Turn—over a one-year period principally during after-school, evenings, weekends and summers—will offer intensive intervention and prevention services to 500 youth. Grant funds will be used for general operating expenses that include staffing, facility rentals, program services/supplies, and administration. The UTH TURN program’s measurable youth development outcomes will assist young people in attaining an anticipated long-term impact of growing into caring, economically self-sufficient adults who attain leadership skills and maintain nurturing family, school, neighborhood and community relationships.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Mason, *Uth Turn*, 9.

<sup>33</sup> Fund for Community Leadership Development, *UTH TURN: A Community-Based Youth Intervention Program Model Serving Court-Adjudicated and High-Risk Youth*, 1 (See Appendix 9).



## **Chapter Five**

### **2005-2006 Uth Turn: Constructing a New Paradigm for Urban Youth Ministry**

In March 2005 United Way of New York City awarded FCLD/Uth Turn a service grant for the Taproot Foundations to do a new, updated brochure for our organization. Taproot engaged the services of a professional designer and photographer for this project. After devoting considerable resources and time Taproot produced an eight panel, folded brochure that is the best that FCLD/Uth Turn has ever had.

From 1999 to date Uth Turn has had four brochures. An examination of these documents reflect a continuous evolution of our project and illustrate how Uth Turn was and continues to change the paradigm of youth ministry.

The first brochure (1999-2000) contained several notable quotes that included the following from NYTS President Dr. M. William Howard—“The Youth Intervention Project is reshaping the very understanding of youth ministry for churches in at-risk neighborhoods, as well as the way theological students are taught to think about ministries to youth for generations to come.” Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III, pastor, Abyssinian Baptist Church stated that “[t]he Youth Intervention Project is an excellent example of how the state government and community based organizations, including churches, can cooperate to ensure that out most vulnerable children...grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and humanity.”

In the second brochure (2001-2002) we listed three things that made Uth Turn unique, as follows: “(1) Uth Turn is a collaboration of churches, criminal justice partners, social service agencies, Fund for Community Leadership and Development (FCLD) and the New York Theological Seminary (NYTS). (2) NYTS is the only seminary in the country that grants degrees within the prison system. Graduates of the Masters of Professional Studies Program at Sing Sing work with Uth Turn as Facilitators, who mentor youth, facilitate group meetings and advocate on behalf of young people with Youth Officers, Judges, Principals and family members. (3) Master of Divinity graduate students intern for a full year at each of the eleven Uth Turn sites and through their work with “at-risk” youth are redefining and expanding the meaning of youth ministry.”

In the third brochure (2002-2003) we highlighted our funding, special designation, youth served, costs, collaborations and plans for 2004. “In 1999, Uth Turn received a four year grant from the Ford Foundation, and in 2001, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services designated Uth Turn as the ‘Model Youth Intervention Project.’ Uth Turn served 794 youth in 2003, 310 of those people court adjudicated and 83% of that number did *not* return to the system.”

Finally, in 2006, with the aid of a service grant from the Taproot Foundation, Uth Turn produced an eight-panel brochure—filled with important information, graphs and photos. The following panel focuses on Uth Turn’s success in reducing recidivism. “In 2005, Uth Turn worked with 581 court-adjudicated youths. Of these, 92% had no further problems with the criminal court system. By providing a supportive, nurturing environment, we help young people develop interpersonal, problem solving, ethical and cognitive skills that will lead them towards success. Through Uth Turn, at-risk young

people achieve improved personal mastery, social acceptance, school performance, parental trust, self-esteem and employability.”<sup>34</sup>

In 2006 FCLD/Uth Turn was awarded another service grant by United Way of New York City for the Taproot Foundation to upgrade and revise our website. The background, project goals and scope of this initiative were stated in the website requirements brief as follows:

1. **Background**—Uth Turn has experienced growth in program services and staff over the past seven years (1999-2006). They are in extreme need of a communication strategy to strengthen and diversify their fund development plan, marketing and solicitation strategies. An advanced website focused at funding organizations as well as the general public that included: media kit information and forms, news and event information with administrative content management, e-mails and suggestions for a donation collection tool.
2. **Project goals and Scope**
  - a. Develop an advanced website that would enable Uth Turn to strengthen its communication and marketing efforts which will include diversity in fund development.
  - b. Provide Public Relations/Marketing ideas on how to promote the new site to increase traffic and allow Uth Turn to be competitive with some of the top youth organizations in the country.
  - c. Provide reporting to track website growth and effectiveness.
3. It is my contention that our new brochure and website will enable us “tell the story” of how Uth Turn is evolving as a new paradigm for doing urban youth

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<sup>34</sup> Uth Turn Brochure, #4, 2006.

ministry. One of the main goals of the new website is fund development which will allow us to open new Uth Turn church sites and expand our services to Uth Turn participants. Raising funds in this fashion would eliminate the expenses to churches in hosting a ministry for at-risk youth.

### **Representative Uth Turn Success Stories 2005**

What follows below are five representative success stories of young people served at various Uth Turn sites throughout the city. The five stories provide us a window into the lives of the young people we serve.<sup>35</sup>

**Jim** is a 16 year-old student who attended High School in Staten Island where his mother works as a volunteer in the after school program. The Facilitator met with Jim through the introduction of his sister who was a Uth Turn participant.

Both his mother and sister said Jim was changing and needed someone to talk to. Everyday he would come to the program, but would not come in to see the Facilitator. Finally, his mother asked the Facilitator to go to family court with them to face charges of Jim's marijuana possession. A week prior to court, the Facilitator and Jim talked extensively and he admitted he had an addiction to marijuana. He wanted help.

Following his first court visit, Jim was remanded to Uth Turn and was required to attend regularly. The Facilitator visited his school guidance counselor and learned that Jim was failing because he was not going to school.

The Facilitator addressed all of Jim's issues at the same time and began to search for a school that would deal with his problems. After meeting with his mother several times, the Facilitator helped Jim get into a school for youth with drug problems. The Facilitator returned with Jim to family court and gave the judge a favorable report. Jim's charges were reduced.

To date, Jim is a regular Uth Turn participant but he does not attend often because he is in school until late and has a curfew. The Facilitator maintains weekly phone communication with him and his mother. Jim has made a complete turn around being drug free and attending school every day.

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<sup>35</sup> Names of the individuals have been changed.

**Linda** is a 16 year-old girl who attends school in Brooklyn. She was referred to Uth Turn through the Brooklyn Criminal Court and the District Attorney's Office. She, along with some other youth from her school called in a bomb threat to the school that caused a great deal of hysteria and confusion. Linda had used her cell phone and the call was traced back to her. She was arrested and referred to Uth Turn.

Linda was well spoken and very remorseful about what she had done although she could give no reasonable answer as to why she did what she did. Her remorse was enough for the Facilitator to really get to know her and help her. From day one, Linda was faithful about coming to the program and she was able to give a favorable report about her the judge and Linda's attorney each of the three times the Facilitator appeared in court for her.

This young person participated in community service every week giving food to the neighborhood residents. She participated in-group discussions and always communicated with the Facilitator when she was not able to make a session. Through their many one-on-one counseling sessions the Facilitator found out that Linda was tutoring fourth graders in math after school. She brought her friends to help with community service projects and on June 19, 2005 she received a certificate of completion from Uth Turn, but she still does attend and she still helps with community outreach.

**Jonah** is an outstanding high school student and made the National Honor Roll List. But, Jonah wanted to be "down with the streets" and was before the Manhattan Supreme Court on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree robbery charges. He had never been involved with criminal activity before.

The judge was sympathetic and agreed that because it was his first offense he would be given the Uth Turn program as an alternative to incarceration. He was remanded to report to Uth Turn with unbroken attendance.

Jonah was one of the better Uth Turn participants. After several intense individual, group and family counseling sessions, Jonah began to refrain from the negative peer pressure and use of marijuana. He obeyed his curfew. His mother no longer complained about him being involved with any drug use or curfew violations.

Jonah became the youth spokesperson for Uth Turn in the Developmental Asset Lab Workshop of Greater New York. He applied for entrance to several Southern colleges while keeping a focus on putting his criminal offense behind him. The judge in Manhattan Supreme Court saw such a dramatic turn around that upon sentencing to probation, she stood and applauded Jonah for his outstanding accomplishments in making the

National Honor Roll List, winning the Developmental Assets Award, and gaining acceptance to a university for the Fall 2005 semester.

**Annie** is a 16 year-old student who was suspended from school for fighting and is on probation for 1½ years for assault stemming from fighting and starting a fire in the classroom.

The NYC Department of Probation referred Annie to Uth Turn, requesting that the program address her issues of emotional/mental health, truancy/school behavior, and fighting/anger management issues.

When she entered the Uth Turn program, Annie demonstrated low self-esteem because family members made her believe that she could not do anything good. Annie said because of how she was made to feel, she acted out toward people and began fighting and getting into trouble at school.

Uth Turn played a major role in helping Annie get her life back together. The program provided counseling once a week, group sessions once a week, and artistic talent/sign language activities once a week. The Facilitator maintained regular contact and worked with Annie around her behavior, emotion, fighting, anger management, respect, decision-making, and criminality issues.

For the months she has attended Uth Turn, Annie has not missed a day. She is back in school doing very well and staying out of trouble. She is producing her own CD's in rap music and talking with the other young people her age about doing positive things. Annie wants to focus on communicating better with family members. Annie most likely will receive a letter of completion at her completion of the program in June 2006 or as court mandated.

**Abdul** is a 14 year-old male who lives at home with his mother and father and attends the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Junior High School in Queens. Abdul was playing basketball when a group of young people from a different neighborhood attempted to take over the basketball court. Abdul and his friend stood up to the group and he was physically attacked. Abdul's cousin went and got a gun and the other young people ran away vowing to come back.

Through his parents, Abdul became involved in Uth Turn. He needed a mentor and anger management. A very good artist, Abdul was willing to express himself through his art. He attended Uth Turn and participated in the art program in addition to the counseling, group sessions, and anger management sessions. He began to understand the consequences of fighting with or without guns.

Abdul's peers look up to him as a leader and Uth Turn helped him to learn how to be a leader without violence. Now, Abdul is inspiring other young people to attend the Uth Turn program. He is very focused and has discussed with other young people how to never solve their problems with violence and become subjected to the possibility of jail time.

If Uth Turn had not been in place, Abdul would have retaliated with weapons. So Uth Turn possible prevented Abdul from ending up in the hospital or jail.

### **ATS Review**

In 2005 New York Theological Seminary was to be reviewed by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) to maintain its accreditation. Academic Dean Dr. Lester Edwin Ruiz was coordinating this project and requested I submit a summary of our program, specifying FCLD/Uth Turn links to NYTS as part of this process. We began with the excerpt below:

In 1999 the Fund for Community Leadership and Development (FCLD) set out to provide at-risk young people with the knowledge, skills and behaviors needed to live productive lives and successfully transition to adulthood. Rather than focus on control and punishment, FCLD sought to reduce recidivism in the criminal justice system and make a positive change in young people by supporting them and improving the quality and availability of information, services and material goods. The project was named Youth Turn by the young people, themselves, who engaged in project activities were making U-Turns (UTH TURN) in their lives.

UTH TURN is affiliated with the New York Theological seminary, which is an interdenominational seminary in the heart of New York City with a network of 2,000 pastors. NYTS is committed to helping lay and ordained Christians involved in ministry become more literate, responsible, and effective in the expression of their faith through urban youth ministry. A former civil rights attorney, Rev. C. Vernon Mason currently serves as Chief Executive Officer for the UTH TURN initiative. From the project's inception, Rev. Mason has led UTH TURN into unparalleled success with some of the most hard to reach urban youth. Since 1999, UTH TURN has served more than 1,500 young people with a 2002-2003-program year incarceration recidivism rate of 17%. UTH TURN is being observed as a

national model deploying the best community, school and faith-based organization resources on behalf of at-risk young people.<sup>36</sup>

The goal of this project is to change the paradigm of youth ministry and in telling the story of Uth Turn my intention is to document and record that paradigm shift. In the Uth Turn ATS summary we articulated how Uth Turn was redefining urban youth ministry:

A core feature of the UTH TURN program of activities is its 210-hour curriculum composed of seven modules, each taught over the course of approximately 10, three-hour sessions. UTH TURN teaches seven core competencies: (1) positive self concept and self love, (2) internal locus of control and sense of personal power, (3) future orientation, short and long term goal setting and recognizing that actions have consequences, (4) coping skills and effective stress management, (5) conflict resolution skills, constructive interpersonal communication and problem solving, (6) positive peer interaction and healthy personal associations, and (7) community responsibility, group identity and influencing societal conditions...

Not all program participants need every UTH TURN component, so site personnel match young people with the required services and opportunities. One UTH TURN uniqueness is that it is “more than a program”...UTH TURN personnel work on behalf of at-risk young people on their terms and on their turf.<sup>37</sup>

Uth Turn combines public health and prevention strategies to combat the cyclical imprisonment that afflicts many urban neighborhoods. Mobilizing the high-risk youth as agents in community restoration can break this cycle by helping to rebuild the human and social fabric of high-need neighborhoods.

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<sup>36</sup> *Uth Turn ATS Summary*, May 25, 2004, 1. (See Appendix 10).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



## Chapter Six

### **New York Theological Seminary: Effects of the Master of Professional Studies Program at Sing Sing Prison on Recidivism**

The success of Uth Turn is due in large measure by the participation of our Facilitators—all graduates of the MPS program at the Sing Sing Correctional Facility. In 2005-2006 I was a member of a research team conducting a study on “The Effects of the Master of Professional Studies Program at Sing Sing Prison on Recidivism: A Descriptive Evaluation.” This study was to trace the graduates of the MPS program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility that NYTS has offered to inmates since 1982. Of the 316 men graduated from the program, 160 have been released. Those released have yielded a recidivism rate of only 11% as compared to the statewide rate of 42%. The study was to explore the possible correlation between the MPS program and this lower rate.

While recruitment criteria and procedures—which select students who are highly motivated and already highly educated—significantly contribute to the low rate of recidivism, this study describes the MPS program’s principal components—recruitment and application, selection, teaching and learning, graduation, networking and disposition of students—in order to gain insight into factors within the MPS program that may contribute to lower recidivism.<sup>38</sup>

Between 1985 and 2001, the rate of recidivism in New York State was approximately forty-two percent. The New York State Department of Corrections (DOCS) have found that those inmates earning a GED or completing the Inmate College

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<sup>38</sup> Edison O. Jackson and Josef Sorett, *New York Theological Seminary Effects of the Master of Professional Studies Program at Sing Sing Prison on Recidivism: A Descriptive Evaluation*, October 5, 2006, 1. (See Appendix 11).

Program had significantly lower rates of return—32% and 26%, respectively.

Educational and vocational training have both shown to decrease the probability of recidivism. And while college degree programs—as opposed to the purely vocational—have been shown to decrease the likelihood of re-incarceration by large percentages, the public has shown a reluctance to provide them to inmates. Likewise, several studies have shown that religion has had a positive effect on both inmates' behavior in prison and its rehabilitative powers.<sup>39</sup> Studies of the MPS program have found very low rates of recidivism (0% within twelve months, 9% within twenty-eight months). One scholar states the rates are a “welcome but unintended by-product” of a program reliant on social theory and sacred texts that “reverses the process of degradation involved in imprisonment and creates a community where inmates are held accountable as moral agents.”<sup>40</sup>

The researchers of this study have sought to engage the MPS graduates in order to gain first-hand accounts regarding the impact of the program on rehabilitation and reentry process for the former inmates. The study seeks to answer to the question—“What is going on in the MPS program that might affect the recidivism rate of its alumni?”

As a program of NYTS the mission of the MPS program fits squarely within NYTS's unique commitment as the only seminary in the nation that specializes in training clergy for urban neighborhoods. In this capacity NYTS has been cited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) as a role model for other seminaries seeking to address concerns of people in urban centers throughout the United States. Within the prison context then, the MPS program exists to educate and train inmates to serve in leadership capacities throughout DOCS and in society upon their release from DOCS.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Jackson and Sorett, *NYTS*, 6-7.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

This study identified the key components of the MPS program as follows:

- Recruitment, selection and admissions process
- Program curriculum
- Networking inside and outside of the prison
- Personal accountability (from peers, other alumni, faculty, prison administrators and chaplains)
- Attachment to community—personal relationships
- Media attention
- Program support of identity formation and real world vocation

The Masters of Professional Studies (MPS) Degree is an intensive, one-year, thirty-six credit degree program combining academic course work and field placement within the institution. Applications are available in each chaplain's office throughout DOCS, and each candidate must meet both DOCS and NYTS requirements for admission. Upon admission, each candidate is enrolled in a rigorous academic schedule. In addition, each student completes a year-long field assignment (Supervised Ministry) within the Sing Sing Correctional Facility. Upon completion, MPS students participate in a graduation ceremony—the high point of their strenuous year's work. They are congratulated on their accomplishments, but also commissioned to move forward, to serve as agents of change throughout the prison system. They will be expected to serve as leaders in placements throughout DOCS facilities, where they have played a significant recruiting role for the MPS program.

In interviews, both students and faculty emphasized the notion of community-building *koinonia* as an essential component of the program's success. Here the students learn to discern each other's gifts; and having done so function as mentors, tutors or group leaders. Each class' "success is measured by its collective ability to ensure that

every student reaches the graduation date.”<sup>42</sup> The curriculum emphasizes community and reconciliation throughout the year-long program.

This learning allows students to deconstruct the social systems that facilitate crime and incarceration. Understanding one’s life circumstances from the dual perspective of personal and social morality empowers the student with skills to transform both the self and society. Ethics, church history, theology, pastoral counseling course work engages and revolves around the sacred texts that shape the identity of one’s community, typically the Bible and the Koran. Students are taught a variety of hermeneutical tools to exegete and interpret scripture and daily life. Racism, sexism and classism are oppressions that are routinely addressed. Regardless of the faith affiliation, Christians, Muslims and Jews are not exempt from reflection upon each other’s sacred texts and religious experiences. Students learn how to talk across differences and how to transform a moment of frustration and conflict into a moment of peaceful learning.<sup>43</sup>

The program contributes significantly in reversing the status of degradation during the process of rehabilitation taking place. Throughout DOCS, the prisoners are always referred to by their prison identification number. Here they regain their names—symbolizing the NYTS commitment to “not defining them by their crime but rather by what they choose to offer the world.”<sup>44</sup> The program also offers the inmates a level of privilege and mobility within the prison, and visibility and respect among the other inmates.

The original plan of the MPS program was to provide a core of trained men to work within the prison chaplain system—as assistants to the chaplains, augmenting the counseling, teaching and social services found in the prison system. While there are few studies of the effect of prison religious programs on recidivism, some have found that a deep religious involvement is conducive to adjustment to prison life and low recidivism

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<sup>42</sup> Jackson and Sorett, *NYTS*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Tom O’Connor, Pat Ryan, Crystal Parikh and Victoria Erickson, *Recidivism and the Master in Professional Studies Program at Sing Sing Prison*, Center for Social Research, April 1, 1997, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Jackson and Sorett, *NYTS*, 20.

among those released from prison. The MPS program has a profound respect for religion while its curriculum fits into the more secular tradition generally found in graduate studies of many disciplines. The program role models—chaplains and faculty—are highly skilled and proficient at negotiating the many institutions encountered in life, and impart this knowledge to the students. All of which are found to have an impact on the rate of recidivism of MPS students.

Based on the data available for comparison, the people who complete the Masters of Theology program at Sing Sing had a very low rate of re-arrest in the first two years or so out of prison. This finding raises interesting questions. Is there something about the Masters program that helps individuals to avoid re-arrest, at least in the early years out of Prison? Or were those individuals already significantly different prior to entering the Masters program, in ways that explain their initial low rate of re-arrest? (Such factors as education, race, previous criminal history, and violence of original crime committed should be brought into the analysis, for example.) The MPS program selection process could have selected out only those inmates who were going to succeed upon their release from prison even without the benefit of the MPS program...If the significant differences in re-arrest rates continue to occur after factors like education, race and previous criminal history are controlled, then it is likely that the program itself had an important impact on recidivism.<sup>45</sup>

One of the main goals of Uth Turn for our at-risk youth, and particularly those who are court adjudicated, is to reduce recidivism. It is one of my basic contentions that the reason Uth Turn is successful in reducing recidivism is because of our MPS graduates from Sing Sing who do *not* return to prison. By employing MPS graduates from Sing Sing, Uth Turn is the *only* program in the nation that is using these proven and effective resources as the foundation of our at-risk youth program. Moreover, MPS graduates can—with authenticity—work with at-risk youth because they have traveled the same road as many of our youth. Many of our program facilitators see their own selves reflected in the young people they are now serving. Our MPS graduates, having faced similar

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<sup>45</sup> O'Connor et al., *Recidivism*, 6.

challenges, peer pressure and obstacles, can serve as tangible, real-life role models to help turn around the lives of our youth and rescue them from criminality, drug use and despair. Columbia University Professor Manning Marable has lauded the Sing Sing program, stating:

The NYTS program is designed to prepare these men for community service. There is a rigorous academic program, where lectures and classroom discussions are held three hours a day, five days a week. Forty-two credits must be taken to complete the degree. Inmates are also required to perform an additional 15 hours of field service within the prison, which can range from working in the AIDS ward to tutoring other prisoners. Since the program was established, more than 200 men have graduated with master's degrees. *Only 5 percent of those inmates who have completed the program and were released were later returned to prison, compared to a repeat offender rate in New York State of 42 percent.* (Emphasis added.)<sup>46</sup>

Thus, to the question, “Can anything good come out of Sing Sing?” the answer is a resounding yes. The creation of a new paradigm for doing urban youth ministry is a continuation of a long tradition for New York Theological Seminary. NYTS has long served immigrants, the poor, missionary communities and, in 1965, made an institutional commitment to civil rights. The MPS program continues in that tradition.

A recurring theme in Uth Turn and in this project is the invaluable contributions the MPS graduates have made to the success of our project. One of those persons is Mark Graham, MPS graduate and former Uth Turn facilitator who was featured in an April 7, 2008 *New York Times* article devoted to his work in helping transition ex-offenders to life outside of prison by providing transitional housing to them.

### **FCLD, Inc. Uth Turn Case Statement**

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<sup>46</sup> Manning Marable, “Mastering the Art of Black Male Prisoner Education,” *Black Issues in Higher Education*, September 16, 1999, 80.

In the fall of 2006, I requested that FCLD/Uth Turn project evaluator Dr. John Cardwell prepare a Uth Turn case statement that would support a five-year, \$2,000,000 a year fund development initiative. The thirty-two page case statement describes a state in which

[T]he juvenile system appears not to be able to provide prevention services, appropriate intervention, and alternatives to secure confinement for African-American and Latino delinquents and offenders. This disturbing condition of overrepresentation of minority youth in the juvenile justice system constitutes one of the most crucial high-visibility high-priority challenges of urban America...

This overrepresentation [of minority youth] is likely a result of a number of complex factors. While it is important to recognize the disturbing condition of at-risk youth in urban America, it is also critical to isolate and identify protective or resiliency factors that enable at-risk young people to succeed and thrive in spite of obstacles. Gang warfare, low parent and teacher expectations, physical, verbal or sexual abuse; alcohol or other drug abuse; premature pregnancy; and so forth are counteracted by positive peer and adult interaction, a positive sense of self, sense of personal power and internal locus of control, high emotional stability and willingness to work with others toward positive goals.<sup>47</sup>

In 2006, the FCLD/Uth Turn Board of Directors decided to launch a five-year, \$2,000,000 annual campaign in order to provide the resources to scientifically measure the Uth Turn outcomes, establish its effectiveness, and encourage the wider adoption of if model to other at-risk providers. The goal is to demonstrate the social and emotional support networks of churches, mosques and synagogues to shield at-risk youth from the negative effects of poor, urban neighborhoods; and to support constructive social practices, policies and attitudes they require to lead healthy and productive lives. Such measurement would show not just that it works, but why it does so—thus enhancing our ability to strengthen our relationships with both churches and government agencies, while garnering higher donation rates and greater financial and policy support.

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<sup>47</sup> John Cardwell, *Uth Turn Case Statement*, October 17, 2006, 2. (See Appendix 12).

## Chapter Seven

### Teaching as Transformation at The New York Theological Seminary

It is my belief that it was neither happenstance nor coincidence that New York Theological Seminary started an at-risk youth intervention project in 1999—indeed, it articulates the special type of seminary has been since its founding in 1900. It is in this deep soil of theological education, standing on the shoulders of the giants who have made NYTS a place where education is transformative, that I have had the privilege of teaching since the spring of 2000. What follows are my reflections on those experiences that have contributed to Uth Turn developing a new paradigm for doing urban youth ministry.

In the spring of 2000, Dr. T. Richard Snyder, NYTS academic dean invited me to teach a course entitled, *Administering Charitable Choice*, during the fall 2000 semester.

The course description is as follows:

Federal and state governments are increasingly turning to non-governmental organizations to meet many of the social needs of people. Faith based organizations have been a major focus of this new approach. This course will address the legal, administrative and financial issues posed by government funding of faith based organizations. How can these organizations be effective and responsible? In addition, issues of identity in light of Church/State relations will be explored. (See Appendix 13.)

This course was timely and relevant inasmuch as Uth Turn was the *first* program funded by New York State that New York Theological Seminary had operated directly, or in connection with the Fund for Community Leadership Development, Inc. In addition Uth Turn was housed in NYTS partner churches and our project utilizes NYTS Master of



Divinity graduate students as Uth Turn interns. Therefore, I envisioned that *Administering Charitable Choice* would explore topics directly related to Uth Turn. Caithlin Baker and Pal Chapman from the Employment Project, and the Rev. Peter Laarman, pastor, Judson Memorial Church were invaluable resources and participants in the design of this course. Caithlin Baker co-taught the course, and the class discussions, texts, and final papers proved to be very helpful in our Uth Turn Project as we were in the embryonic stage of attempting to develop a new paradigm for urban ministry.

During the fall semester of 2002 NYTS President Hillary Gaston appointed me to the faculty as Visiting Professor of Theology and Urban Ministry. I served in that capacity for six years, and on June 1, 2008 was appointed for the upcoming academic year under the outstanding leadership of NYTS President Dr. Dale T. Irvin. In the fall semester 2003 I co-taught Critical Interpretation with my mentor, President Irvin.

### **Theology and Urban Youth Ministry**

Since the launch of Uth Turn in 1999, theology and youth ministry has been part of the curriculum at the New York Theological Seminary. These are required courses for NYTS M. Div. Uth Turn interns, and for the past nine years NYTS and Uth Turn have been on the cutting edge of theological education and urban ministry as we have trained ninety-six NYTS D. Min. Uth Turn interns who have mentored and transformed the lives of over five thousand at-risk youth in underserved communities in New York City. Our interns have worked with NYTS MPS graduates in NYTS partner churches. The considerable gifts, talents and life experiences of the Uth Turn interns have been invaluable components in the development of a new paradigm for urban youth ministry. One shining example is Rev. Karim Camara who, in 1999, was in our inaugural class of

Uth Turn interns. Rev. Camara was assigned to the First Baptist Church of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York, the Rev. Dr. Clarence Norman, Sr., Pastor. Dr. Norman was so impressed with Rev. Camara and Uth Turn that following his graduation, Rev. Camara was appointed executive minister at First Baptist, where he also continued as the Uth Turn site supervisor. In 2006, Rev. Camara was elected to the New York State Assembly and was responsible for FCLD/Uth Turn receiving a grant from Con Edison in 2007.

The course description for Theology and Urban Youth Ministry (TMU 225 and 226) is as follows:

This course will explore various aspects and methodologies of engaging in Urban Youth Ministry with at risk and inner city youth in a non-traditional setting. Particular attention will be given to the theological underpinnings of ministering to urban youth whose backgrounds and life styles cover a variety of socioeconomic and religious traditions.

The students are all required to write a paper entitled “My Theology and Urban Youth Ministry Credo.” Over the years students have engaged in a new form of youth ministry and have come to deep understanding of themselves and their ministry, and how to relate to young people in need of help and guidance. Following are reflections from students enrolled in this course.

**Student 1:** My theology is personal and is based upon the Quaker belief, ‘[t]hat the light of God and the divine breadth of life are in each person and each has the opportunity to express their divinity...I believe that the at-risk, street youth has the divine right to express God as he/she is led by the spirit...Youth workers are role models for the young person. As the youth learn to parent themselves they develop a transitional family that they feel ‘know where they are coming from.’ The peer culture, gang culture provides the adolescent with a subculture support that ‘feels like home and family;’ an alternative place to grow, experiment and change. This transitional family occupies a major place in the youth’s life because it’s the family that the youth created, it’s the family that they believe in for

themselves (moved away from family of origin). Without this foster family the young person experiences feeling of emotional loneliness, fear, depression, an absence of love...My desire is to follow the gospel of Matthew 18: 15-16. As the shepherd, my goal is to mentor and guide the adolescent towards a spiritual self-awareness and offer them a 'newness' as they attempt to grow, change and develop into a positive young adult. The maturing young person brings a 'newness' that liberates from stagnation and the old comfortable and dysfunctional position that we encase ourselves in. The 'newness' is the 'Good News' of the gospel that leads the young person out of the wilderness.

**Student 2:** [M]y theological approach with youth ministry is to be as honest as I can be with the youths, as well as making the situations real. We all have been through something bad and good that can help save the lives of our youths. How many of our youths are in the system because their parents or their teachers lied to them. What about the many youths who are living on the streets, in gangs, and/or contemplating suicide because some Christian leaders did not tell the truth about their trials and tribulations...As a youth leader who believes the churches are called to urban ministry for transformation of communities is a way of helping youth at risk. A majority of our youths at risk lives in poor communities that are considered hopeless...[W]e are called by God to challenge social structures of injustice and replace them with structures designed to benefit all people...My theology of urban youth ministry in the context of poverty and economic marginalization is that I must be faithful to the biblical vision of justice and equality by offering a critique of injustice and oppression as demonstrated by ancient Near Eastern, ancient Israelite and traditional African cultures. Due to the fact that injustice and oppression still exist today, I must preach by upholding the values of justice, economic liberation, sharing, and caring for the needy members of our society.

My theology of urban youth ministry is based on Luke 4: 18 because Jesus came to make a difference. 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.'

**Student 3** (a Uth Turn intern): As I'd never had the opportunity to work with youth in this type of setting, I really did not know what to expect. So I was eager to find out...the young men and women enrolled in Uth Turn come from varied backgrounds. Some with extensive arrest records, some have school delinquencies, and then there are those who simply come. While their personal histories may be different, they are all in need of the same things. They need guidance, structure to know that someone genuinely cared about them...

S., a young lady who has been attending for 5 years, should be the Uth Turn poster child. She knows what can be accomplished through inner strength and determination...This young lady, whose mother died when she was just a young teen, had run away from home several times, lost interest in school, and was lost in 'the system,' until she came to Uth Turn. Facilitator Willis Steele helped sign her up for Job Corp, which she has completed; has helped her find employment; has helped her navigate her way through various social service agencies that were withholding financial benefits that were due her.

From September until now, I have watched her bloom before my eyes. A once quiet, shy and reserved lady with very low self-esteem is now a confident, out-spoken achiever who walks with her head up high.

Society runs a masquerade game that tells people of color to wear a mask that hides their identity. But the mask hides more than the color of black and brown skin. The mask blocks the light of hope and stamps out self-esteem. The job of youth ministry is to crush the mask...that blinds their eyes from seeing big corporate plans designed to keep them in bondage, in jail, in the ghetto and away from education and prosperity.

If we are to reach our youth and save them from the streets, poverty, and despair and bring them into the light of freedom, we must do what Jesus did. We must acknowledge that we have been sent to fulfill a mission. Like Jesus, we have been anointed and appointed to serve the children in love and humility. Like Jesus, we are to fight the powers that be. Like Jesus, we are to proclaim God's message of hope. We are to bring them to the path of righteousness, and point them in the right direction of freedom. We are to feed them words of truth that edify their minds and restores their dreams. Doing so, gives them the power they need to turn their lives around and embrace the love of God with grateful hearts.

The credos reflected lessons learned in practical ministry of our NYTS M. Div.

Uth Turn interns at the conclusion of the fall and spring semesters. I believe these theology and urban youth ministry credos illustrate the paradigm shift in urban youth ministry. A student in the spring 2008 term illustrates the new ministry well. "[T]he voice of hip hop as manifested in the art of music and spoken word plays a role in the spiritual formation of at-risk youth. When used as illustrations in sermons and bible studies, music and the lyrics contained therein functions, just as they did during slavery,

as the bridge over troubled waters that will...prevent young people from drowning in the sea of doubt and despair while connecting them to the hope that can be found in relationship to Jesus Christ.”

In order to develop a new paradigm for urban youth ministry, NYTS and Uth Turn had to teach and train a cadre of M. Div. students in theology and urban youth ministry, and in working directly with at-risk youth. As CEO of the Fund for Community Leadership and Development, Inc./Project Uth Turn, and Visiting Professor of Theology and Urban Youth Ministry, I am doubly delighted to report that since 1999 ninety-six NYTS M. Div students have completed TMU 225-226 and have significantly contributed in our development of a new paradigm for urban youth ministry.

During the spring and summer of 2002 the issue of slavery and reparations was being widely debated and I proposed that NYTS offer a course on this subject. The proposal was approved; the course was offered in the fall of 2002 and approximately fifty students enrolled for this 4-credit course. The Course description is as follows:

One hundred and thirty seven years after slavery was officially abolished, African Americans continue to experience the political, economic, social and psychological effects of that ‘peculiar institution.’ Our institutions of government, finance, civil life and religion have never been held to a full accounting. Repair, in other words, has yet to be achieved. This is the situation that the reparations movement is seeking to redress. Against the historical background of the reign of terror of the slavocracy, and in the view of the role that particular social institutions played in maintaining the system of chattel labor, we will seek to promote a new reckoning with the past that points the way forward to specific solutions for the future.

Reckoning and repairing are concepts that are profoundly theological in nature, and are deeply implicated in any Christian understanding of reconciliation and redemption. It is important for us to note this for the class from the outset. One of the assumptions that will be undergirding our work all semester is that where there is historic injustice the Gospel requires reparations. In the course of the semester we will have occasion from time to time to consider various arguments that are being made

against reparations for slavery today. For those of us who are teaching the course, however, the question is not *whether*, but *how*. To this end we will be looking for *solutions*. We want to generate new ideas for our collective consideration, to spark new healing impulses, to repair the torn fabric of our social life. Our work remains guided by that vision for the beloved community, a vision that has proven so elusive and yet so compelling.<sup>48</sup>

In the spring of 2003 this writer was invited to participate in a forum at Abyssinian Baptist Church on slavery and reparations and the panelists included Dr. Cornel West and Harvard law professor Charles Ogletree. Over 2,000 people attended this very informative event.

During the fall of 2003 I taught THU-220, The Civil Rights Movement Historical and Theological Perspectives. The course description is as follows:

[T]he Civil Rights Movement in America was one of the most important and transformative social, political, legal and cultural events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Civil Rights Movement brought a paradigm shift in American Theological thought as well. From 1955 to his assassination on April 4, 1968 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., played a central role in this movement as Preacher, Prophet, Theologian, Writer, Educator, Social Theorist and Activist. This class will play particular attention to the challenges Dr. King represented to the clergy during that period and the challenge that his Ministry represents in our contemporary context. ‘Separate but Equal’ was the social law of the land even after *Brown v. Board* and this class will examine the strategies that the Civil Rights leaders utilized to attack this doctrine. Politically, this class will explore the effect the Civil Rights Movement had on the Presidential election in 1960 when President John F. Kennedy defeated Richard Nixon.

This class will examine the role that Black Women played in the Civil Rights Movement. Rosa Parks is acknowledged for her contributions, however, Ella Baker, Septima Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Way Delee, Clara Muhammad, Diane Nash, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson and countless others are not acknowledged for the important roles that they played in the Civil Rights Movement. This class will endeavor to correct this historical oversight. Similarly, this class will lift up the roles young people played in the Civil Rights Movement. Dr. King was 26 years old when he was elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association and assumed the leadership of the Montgomery’s Bus

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<sup>48</sup> *Slavery and Reparations*, course syllabus, Appendix 13.

Boycotts that lasted 381 days. The students who desegregated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas—The Little Rock Nine—were all teenagers. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the students who led the Sit-In Movement were young people. Scores of martyrs of the Civil Rights Movement were young people:

1. The Lynching of Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955. It is this professor's contention that the murder of Emmett Till combined with the Montgomery Bus Boycott formed the foundation of the Modern Civil Rights Movement;
2. On September 15, 1963, three weeks following the 'March on Washington' a bomb killed four little girls as they attended the Sunday school of though 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Dr. King delivered the eulogy for the martyred children.
3. On June 21, 1964 three young civil rights workers, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James Chaney were murdered in Meridian, Mississippi.

President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in November 1963 and Vice-President, Lyndon Baines Johnson became President of the United States. On July 2, 1964, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act that was the most far-reaching Civil Rights Legislation since Reconstruction. This class will examine the changing currents in the Civil Rights Movement as the War in Vietnam escalated. Our class will analyze Dr. King's attack on the U.S. Vietnam War Policy and his Sermon: 'Time to Break Silence' delivered at Riverside Church on April 4, 1967.

As People of God, We Have Come This Far by Faith and all that we can experience and in this class is discern how God is speaking to us today so that we can apply the lessons learned during the Civil Rights Movement to build God's Kingdom on Earth as it is in Heaven.<sup>49</sup>

As a member of the core faculty at New York Theological Seminary since 2002 it is this writer's considered belief that NYTS students are gifted, multi-talented, committed, extraordinary servants of the most high God. It has been a distinct privilege and honor to teach, advise and to witness how God is using NYTS students to transform the lives of God's people. This writer has also been student advisor to and supervised independent study projects of some of these extraordinary students. One such student

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<sup>49</sup> *The Civil Rights Movement Historical and Theological Perspectives*, course syllabus, Appendix 13.

was Dr. Edison O. Jackson, President of Medgar Evers College. During the 2004 spring semester, President Jackson conducted an independent study that this writer supervised entitled “Male Self-awareness and Empowerment Seminar,” which focused on the education and retention of African-American males in higher education. It is my belief that the education of young people is a critical element in Uth Turn’s goal of creating a new paradigm for urban youth ministry. Moreover, this writer would argue that *faith* and *education* are the keys that will open the doors of opportunity for our at-risk youth and will point the way for young people to become productive and contributing members of our communities.

It is through the aforementioned work that I read with great appreciation Dr. Jackson’s program plan and instructional portfolio for his proposed study. The Male Development and Empowerment Center (MDEC) and the male self-awareness seminar started by Dr. Jackson at Medgar Evers College became so successful in the education and retention of male students of color, that it was adopted and offered in other colleges in the City University of New York. MDEC was featured in a recent article in The Positive Community which stated that “[w]hile the young men complete the same course requirements as others, a freshman, male-only class along with a series of seminars deals with getting them to understand who they are and what they stand for as men.”<sup>50</sup>

To provide institutional support for the male self-awareness seminar, Dr. Jackson prepared a proposal in 2004 for an Urban Male Development and Empowerment Center (MDEC) to address and problem of the “under enrollment of urban males, defined at

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<sup>50</sup> G. R. Mattox, “A Campus Grows in Brooklyn: Medgar Evers College President Creates a Jewel in Crown Heights,” *The Positive Community*, September 2007, 30.



African, Caribbean, African-American Latino and Hispanic males.”<sup>51</sup> The mission is to prepare male students to be educated, productive citizens by (1) guiding them through secondary school and into higher education; (2) developing in urban male students an ardent desire for intellectual growth; (3) inculcating an understanding and appreciation of their place in history and as role models; and (4) developing urban male student leadership skills that will allow them to serve as change agents in their communities.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, at our 2005 NYTS commencement exercises at Abyssinian Baptist Church, Dr. Jackson received the highest honor conferred on an M. Div. graduate student – the President’s Award. This writer and FCLD/Uth Turn are blessed to have Dr. Edison O. Jackson as a member of the Board of Directors of the Fund for Community Leadership Development, Inc.

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<sup>51</sup> Edison O. Jackson, *Urban Male Development and Empowerment Center: A Proposal*, February 9, 2004, Appendix 14.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **2007 Uth Turn and a New Paradigm for Urban Youth Ministry**

On 1/23/07 I received a call from Keith Sharman from CBS News: *60 Minutes* wanted my input regarding a story they were planning to produce on “Snitching.” The discussion was wide ranging and evolved into police-community relations, the Sean Bell case, Uth Turn, New York Theological Seminary and our M.P.S. program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility. Mr. Sharman requested a meeting with our facilitators and Uth Turn participants. We formed a youth focus study group and for the next several weeks we met with *60 Minutes* to discuss our views and opinions with respect to “Snitching.” Following these sessions we were delighted to learn that Uth Turn participants Victoria Chan, Tessa Henry and Alex McCall were selected for the program. *60 Minutes* assembled a huge production crew for the filming at The Interchurch Center and CNN correspondent Anderson Cooper interviewed our young people. The program aired on April 22<sup>nd</sup> and included New York City Police Commissioner Raymond Kelley, Geoffrey Canada, C. E. O., Harlem Children’s Zone, Professor David Kennedy, John Jay College, and Rapper Cam’ Ron.

This *60 Minutes* program marked the first time that Uth Turn was recognized by a national news organization. And for our young people it was the first time that Victoria, Tessa and Alex had been participants in a news program. Uth Turn was mentioned in the

segment and Keith Sharman, *60 Minutes* Associate Producer wrote to thank us for our participation.

### **2007 Successful Grants**

Carnegie Corporation of New York selected Uth Turn for one of the most distinctive honors that we have yet to receive by the awarding of \$50,000 for each of the years 2006 and 2007. Mr. Vartan Gregorian, President of the Carnegie Corporation, in a letter dated June 14, 2006, wrote that “institutions like yours are responsible for giving New York City the unparalleled community spirit...The grant has been made as flexible as possible in order to offer you the greatest latitude in continuing to focus on your mission.”

As C.E.O. for Fund for Community Leadership Development Inc/Project Uth Turn I was overjoyed and grateful to be notified that FCLD/Project Uth Turn will receive a \$100,000 grant for 2008-2009 that would be administered by the Carnegie Corporation. This award means that FCLD/Uth Turn received grants administered by Carnegie Corporation of New York for four consecutive years: 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009! This affirmation of our work is encouraging and will motivate all of us associated with Uth Turn to renew and redouble our efforts to change the paradigm for urban youth ministry.

In the spring of 2007 New York Theological Seminary and FCLD/Uth Turn submitted a joint funding application with NYTS to the office of the Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer. NYTS and FCLD/Uth Turn needed to update and revamp our information technology systems and our proposed funding project was titled “Technology Enhancement for Stronger Intervention.” NYTS and FCLD share an integrated computer network system that unfortunately is inadequate to our needs. The

proposal is to replace the existing technical infrastructure they share; provide laptops for the Uth Turn facilitators to use in the field; install a new server, computers and printers in the offices of both organizations; add computers and audio-visual equipment to the Uth Turn sites; and replace the computers at the lab used by MPS students at Sing Sing.

After an intensive and exhaustive application process and several face-to-face meetings, Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer allocated \$500,000 for our technology enhancement for stronger intervention! There was one major obstacle: we could not receive the funding in 2007 because the New York City Council and the Mayor declared a one-year moratorium on funding for “non-city” projects. On February 20, 2008 NYTS President Dr. Dale Irvin, Rev. Jacques Degraff and I met with Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stronger, Deputy Borough President Rosemonde Pierre Louis, Budget Director Susannah Vickers and Capitol Project Manager Tyrone Bowman, Sr. As a result of that meeting FCLD will be resubmitting our capital funding request for FY 09 prior to April 1, 2008.

#### **A Five Year Strategic, Fund Development and Marketing Plan for FCLD/Uth Turn**

FCLD/Uth Turn was awarded a direct technical service grant by United Way of New York City on January 5, 2007. This service grant was for non-profit connection to develop a five-year strategic, fund development and marketing plan for FCLD/Uth Turn. The need for a strategic plan is a top priority of the FCLD Board of Directors and this writer as the C.E.O. of FCLD, Inc. United Way of New York City provided a budget of \$28,500 for this service grant and this writer was pleased to learn that John Magisano, a 1998 NYTS M. Div. graduate and former classmate worked for Nonprofit Connection and would be our project manager. The scope of the work was to assist in developing a

five-year strategic and fund-raising plan. A re-examination of the organization's mission, vision, and by-laws would provide the framework to expand programs and broaden the advocacy agenda. Finally, on January 16, 2008 Mr. Magisano submitted to the FCLD Board of Directors a fundraising narrative, a board covenant agreement and an individual fundraising plan.

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007 I had a meeting with Dr. Cornel West, class of 1943 University Professor of Religion at Princeton University. Dr. West was the keynote speaker at Abyssinian Baptist Church a month earlier when we announced the year-long celebration of the 200<sup>th</sup> (1808-2008) anniversary of Abyssinian. Following our celebration, I spoke to Dr. West and we scheduled the June 6<sup>th</sup> meeting to discuss New York Theological Seminary, FCLD and Project Uth Turn. We met, broke bread and talked for three hours, and at the end of our discussion Dr. West asked to join the Board of Directors for the Fund for Community Leadership Development! This writer was delighted and humbled to present this request to the FCLD Board of Directors. The FCLD board members were equally excited and overwhelmingly receptive to Dr. West joining the board.

On August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007 this writer was invited to attend a reception for the Ron Brown Scholars who are a group of some of the most gifted, talented and committed young people this writer has had the honor of meeting! After attending the reception this writer was so impressed that I invited one of the students to Abyssinian and volunteered to be her mentor. The scholar's name is Carmelle T. Norice, whose essay appears in *I Have Risen, Essays by African-American Youth*. The Ron Brown Scholar Board member – Pamela Blochman – who invited me to the reception asked for Uth Turn participants to consider submitting applications to the Ron Brown Scholar Program. Uth Turn should

also start an alumni association where we celebrate the success of our graduates and also encourage them to serve as mentors and role models for Uth Turn participants.

On November 1, 2006 United Way of New York City awarded an organizational support services contract for Lawyers Alliance of New York (LANY) to do legal work for FCLD, Inc. The scope of services included a review and amendment of our by-laws and certificate of incorporation and a revision of FCLD's personnel policies manual. The retainer agreement was executed on December 8, 2006 and thereafter LANY senior staff attorney Maria Cilenti and staff attorney Viva Obioha worked tirelessly to complete all of their work for FCLD, Inc. in a professional and expeditious manner.

It should be noted that as Uth Turn continues to strive to develop a new paradigm for urban youth ministry that we pay close attention to the legal entity we are operating. As we look to replicate the Uth Turn model for urban youth ministry it is critically important that our organization's by-laws, certificate of incorporation and personnel policies manual are legally sound and up-to-date. I practiced law in New York State from 1972 to 1995 and in my considered opinion the legal services that LANY has done will allow FCLD, Inc. to grow and expand our services knowing that we can proceed from a firm legal foundation.

New York State Assemblyman and chairman of the Ways and Means Committee Herman D. Farrell, Jr. has been one of the biggest political advocates and supporters for FCLD/Uth Turn. This writer frequently meets with and receives continuous counsel and advice from Assemblyman Farrell who was instrumental in securing our funding for 2007-2008, as he has done in previous years. G. William Hunter, Executive Director of the National Basketball Players Association, has been a consistent financial supporter of

FCLD/Uth Turn. Our collaboration with the NBPA and the 2003 and 2006 miracle on 138<sup>th</sup> Street feeding initiatives provided 5,000 and then 10,000 families boxes of needed food and personal care items.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Uth Turn Approaches Its Tenth Anniversary 1999-2009**

Earlier this year I was invited to become a member of the New York City Task Force on Racial Disparity that is focused on addressing the issues of racial inequalities in the juvenile justice system. The first task force meeting was held at Medgar Evers College on February 29, 2008, which this writer attended. Overwhelming racial disparity still exists at all levels of New York City's juvenile justice system. Youth of color, primarily African-American and Latino youth, are heavily overrepresented at all phases of contact with the juvenile justice system. Youth of color account over 90% of all arrests, juvenile detention, and imprisonment of all youth so placed. This obviously has a direct effect on our work at Uth Turn and in addressing this issue will impact our work with at-risk youth.

Lino A. Solis, Esq. is a member of Abyssinian Baptist Church and was in my new members class. Attorney Solis is Vice President and General Counsel for Thor Equities, and on February 6, 2006 Mr. Solis joined the Board of Directors of FCLD, Inc.

### **Uth Turn as an Agent for Change in New York State Public Policy**

Since New York Theological Seminary started Uth Turn in 1999, our central premise has been that at-risk youth and society are better served if resources were provided to community-based organizations that focused on prevention, alternative to detention, after-care and re-entry. Moreover, Uth Turn has consistently argued that from



a costs benefit analysis investing in preventive programs results in a far greater return on investment than detention programs. Uth Turn has served thousands of youth since 1999 and in fiscal year 2007-2008 served 419 young people with a budget of \$500,000 which is \$1,193 per Uth Turn participant, or \$3.27 per day. This annual cost of \$1,193 is miniscule compared to the \$200,000 annual cost to detain a youth in a residential center.

Most significantly, for the first time since Uth Turn began collaborating with New York State Office of Children & Family Services in 1999, the NYSOCFS commissioner is publicly advocating a “transformation of the juvenile justice system.” In the April 8 issue of New York Nonprofit Press titled “Point of View: Transforming our Juvenile Justice System,” Gladys Carrion, Esq., NYSOCFS commissioner writes:

The time has come to fix New York State’s juvenile justice system. Advocates have pleaded for changes to the system for a long time...What I have found were troubled children—overwhelmingly poor, mostly African-Americans and Latinos—housed hundred of miles from their families and neighborhoods, and far from hope...[Y]oung people have the ability to change their behavior. That means providing them intervention and support. This includes an education, job training, and mental health and substance abuse services to support their rehabilitation and return them to the community. It is, after all, our responsibility to prepare them for a successful transition to adulthood.

[I]t is spending hundreds of millions of dollars on a system that does not work. A system that was founded on the idea that if the state took these children away from their families and the neighborhoods where they got into trouble, then something magical would happen to turn their lives around.

As many as 80 percent of the children who enter the system come back to us or go to prison within three years. That’s grossly unacceptable in any system, especially compared to alternative community-based programs that have a 30 percent recidivism rate...[T]he issue of race in the current system cannot be ignored. Only 44 percent of the children in New York State are African-American or Latino, yet they represent 86 percent of the youth in state custody.

Instead of continuing to pour money into this system [we propose] investing tax dollars in programs that better prevent youth crime, including identifying and helping these children before they come into the system—at a fraction of the current cost.

This includes supporting a community-based system where these children can maintain and strengthen connections with their families and the significant adults in their lives...The transformation of New York's juvenile justice system had been a long time coming. At stake is nothing less than the health and future of our most troubled children and their families.<sup>53</sup>

In 2007-2008 Uth Turn worked directly with youth referred by NYSOCFS and exceeded our goals by 200%. This public announcement of a polity shift, new collaboration with NYSOCFS and new administration in Albany are strong indicators that Uth Turn is developing a new paradigm for urban youth ministry that has contributed to a positive change in New York State public policy regarding the treatment of at-risk youth.

Since Uth Turn started in 1999 we have been advocates for a shift in public policy regarding at-risk youth from incarceration to prevention. In February of this year I received a request from the New York Juvenile Justice Coalition requesting that Uth Turn join a campaign to close youth jails and prisons and for New York State to redirect resources to community-based programs. It was also requested that Uth Turn sign a letter of support of the plan of New York State Office of Children and Family Services to close six youth prisons. Uth Turn joined the coalition and became a signatory on the letter of support.

In addition to Uth Turn's advocacy for a shift in New York State policy from incarceration of at-risk youth to prevention, I have argued that Uth Turn's intervention program with at-risk youth results in *major* returns on *minimal* investment of money.

At an annual cost per participant of \$1,200, or \$3.29 per day Uth Turn provides a tremendous benefit to at-risk youth and reduced crime and public safety to the community for a very low cost. The return on investment includes reducing recidivism,

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<sup>53</sup> Gladys Carrion "Transforming our Juvenile Justice System," *New York Nonprofit Press*, April 2008, 5.

returning our participants to school and to facilitate employment for Uth Turn participants. Moreover, in 2004 Uth Turn conducted a longitudinal study to track participants who had been in the program for a year or more. The study found Uth Turn compares quite favorably when one examines the high costs of detention and other alternative to detention programs. In 2006 I submitted the following report to Uth Turn's primary funder, NYSOCFS:

FCLD maintained 12 OCFS-funded Uth Turn sites across four New York City boroughs...from October 1 through December 28, 2006. With a yearly budget of \$700,00, seven facilitators...served 429 at-risk 13-20 year old participants. The strategy was to improve the participants' homes and communities as nurturing environments and enhance their self-esteem and inter-personal-development and leadership skills with the objective of reducing recidivism.

The main program strategy was to provide a cost-effective \$700,000 alternative to detention (ATD) for at-risk youth who live in high-need NYC neighborhoods and need intervention—especially for non-violent low-level offenses.

- The Uth Turn yearly cost per participant for program year 2006 was \$1,632, which is \$4.47 per day.
- The average NYC annual detention cost for one youth in secure detention in 2005 was \$149,650.
- The average 2005 cost of ATD programs run by the NYC Department of Probation was \$12,377 per year per young person.
- If the 429 young people served by the FDCLD/Uth Turn in program year 2006 were held in secure detention, the cost to the government would have been at least \$67,342,500. If these 429 young people were enrolled in the NYC Department of Probation ATD, the cost would have been at least \$5,551,650.

In fiscal year 2007-2008 Uth Turn provided an alternative to detention for at-risk youth that was more cost-effective than 2006. In fiscal year 2007-2008 Uth Turn served 419 young people at a cost of \$1,193 per Uth Turn participant, or \$3.27 per day compared to \$1,632 per participant, or \$4.47 per day in 2006. It is a testament to the value of Uth Turn that after several years of advocacy that there has been a positive shift

in public policy from incarceration to prevention regarding at-risk youth. It is personally and professionally encouraging that Uth Turn's cost/benefit argument is being heard in the halls of government.

Since its inception in 1999 Uth Turn has been supported and integrated as a key program of New York Theological Seminary. In 2007-2008 NYTS President Dr. Dale Irvin awarded full tuition scholarships to our eight NYTS M. Div. Uth Turn student interns totaling \$55,000.

## **Chapter Ten**

### **Uth Turn in New York City from 1999-2008**

What work of New York Theological Seminary and its Uth Turn project can be cited that will speak for and support the contention that Uth Turn represents a new paradigm for urban youth ministry?

Foundational to the creation of Uth Turn as a new paradigm for urban youth ministry is the critical roles of New York Theological Seminary's partner churches and pastors who serve as Uth Turn site pastors who supervise the project, the Uth Turn facilitators and the NYTS M. Div. Uth Turn interns. The partner churches provide "safe" space for our Uth Turn participants, office space and meeting rooms for the project telephone and other administrative support. The pastors are the Uth Turn site supervisors and their support and the support of their congregations are vital and essential components of this new paradigm for urban youth ministry. One of our site pastors, Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts, III of Abyssinian Baptist Church, chairperson of the FCLD, Board of Directors and member since 1999, has also successfully negotiated for FCLD/Uth Turn's funding from New York State Office of Children & Family Services from 1999 to date. Uth Turn serves youth throughout New York City and has sites in all five boroughs and is able to this because of the support of the NYTS partner churches and pastors.

The configuration of at-risk youth, formerly incarcerated NYTS M.P.S. graduates, and NYTS M. Div. graduate students was a "new" model for urban youth ministry when

NYTS launched Uth Turn in 1999. This new paradigm was a breakthrough for NYTS partner churches and represented a radical departure from youth ministry that focuses on serving youth “in” the church. This paradigm shift focuses on at-risk youth who are “outside” of the church and it was, and is, the support of the NYTS partner churches and pastors who make this possible.

Since 1999 ninety-six NYTS M.Div. Uth Turn interns have completed this program. Eight M.Div. Uth Turn interns have been accepted for the 2008-2009 academic year which will be a total of one hundred and four NYTS M.Div. graduate students who have completed the course requirements for theology and urban youth ministry, supervised ministry as Uth Turn interns and worked with at-risk youth and their assigned church sites 20-25 hours a week for the full academic year. Since 1999 Uth Turn has served over 5,000 youth and the NYTS M. Div. Uth Turn interns have contributed immeasurably in the development of a new paradigm for urban youth ministry where the church ministers to “unchurched,” at-risk youth who in the past were excluded. It is my contention that the 104 NYTS M.Div. Uth Turn interns who would have completed the project as Uth Turn celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2009 will spread the message of this new paradigm.

In 1982 NYTS pioneered the Master of Professional Studies program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York. For almost three decades now this M.P.S. program is the only graduate theological studies program in the United States of America that is offered in a correctional institution.

The NYTS M.P.S. program since 1982 has theologically trained, transformed and graduated over three hundred men. It is my contention that the NYTS M.P.S. program is

a model that should be replicated nationally for the education of the incarcerated. When NYTS designed this project, the M.P.S. graduates were included as the core facilitators who would work directly with the at-risk youth. The underlying rationale is that the NYTS M.P.S. graduates can speak authentically to at-risk youth and help turn their lives around because these at-risk youth are in a very real sense mirror images of who the M.P.S. graduates were before they turned their own lives around. The NYTS M.P.S. graduates who work as Uth Turn facilitators/outreach coordinators have been the key to the development of Uth Turn as a new paradigm for urban youth ministry. Uth Turn brochure gives this description of our facilitators:

### **Experienced Mentor Building Hope**

Every Uth Turn participant is mentored by a uniquely qualified facilitator, skilled in helping youth who come from diverse backgrounds. Many of our facilitators are graduates of the Theological Seminary's (NYTS) Master of Professional Studies program at Sing Sing Prison. We are the only youth program in the nation using this proven and effective resource. NYTS graduates are real-life role models who have faced many of the same challenges and pitfalls as these young people and have learned to conquer them. They are lifelines who help rescue these youth from criminality, drug use and despair. Community leaders such as physicians, artists and musicians also volunteer to mentor our youth.<sup>54</sup>

This writer would argue that based upon the lessons learned and most importantly the thousands of at-risk young people served since 1999 that NYTS and Uth Turn have successfully created a new paradigm for urban youth ministry that can and should be replicated in urban communities throughout the nation. Uth Turn is a cutting edge project that needs to be expanded to other church sites in New York City and New York State.

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<sup>54</sup> Uth Turn Brochure, #4, 2006.

Uth Turn formerly known as the “At-Risk Youth Intervention Project” began in 1999 as a demonstration project that was initially funded for one year by the New York State Office of Children & Family Services. Subsequent to the 1999-2000 one year demonstration project NYTSOCFS has funded Uth Turn every year from 2000 to 2008-2009. NYSOCFS designated Uth Turn in 2001 as a “model youth intervention project” and designated FCLD/Uth Turn as a “sole source” provider for funding to the governor’s office. The primary reasons for this support from New York State is that Uth Turn is a path-breaking innovative at-risk youth intervention project and is a new paradigm that utilizes churches, pastors, the formerly incarcerated NYS M.P.S. graduates and NYTS M.Div. graduate students all working together to transform the lives of at-risk youth. This unique configuration and new paradigm has served the needs of over 5,000 at-risk youth in all five boroughs of New York City. I would submit that the most compelling evidence in support of the argument that Uth Turn is a new paradigm for urban youth ministry is that since 1999 Uth Turn has served over 5,000 at-risk youth. Moreover, this writer believes that if New York Theological Seminary had *not* launched Uth Turn in 1999 as a new paradigm for urban youth ministry that number of these youth would have, in the words of this writer’s father, Jesse W. Mason, Sr. “fallen by the wayside.”

Since 1999, FCLD/Uth Turn has been supported by the governors of the State of New York: Governor George Pataki, Governor Eliot Spitzer and Governor David Paterson. FCLD/Uth Turn also enjoys the support of the Honorable Charles B. Rangel, member of Congress and Chairperson of the House Ways and Means Committee and Assemblyman Herman D. Farrell, Chairperson of the NYS Assembly Ways and Means Committee. FCLD/Uth Turn has collaborated with and received consistent support since



Uth Turn started in 1999 from Brooklyn District Attorney Charles “Joe” Hynes and from attorney G. William Hunter, Executive Director of the National Basketball Players Association. Beginning in 2006, Carnegie Corporation of New York has awarded FCLD/Uth Turn four successive grants of \$50,000 each, totaling \$200,000. This *unsolicited* support from Carnegie Corporation of New York was especially gratifying and further affirmed the value and recognition of the services that Uth Turn is providing to at-risk youth in New York City.

In AY 2003-2004 NYTS vice president of academic affairs and academic dean Dr. Lester Edwin Ruiz requested that Uth Turn prepare a narrative/summary of the project that would be submitted to ATS as part of the NYTS accreditation process. Excerpt from the first page of that report focused on Uth Turn as a paradigm that is redefining urban youth ministry.

The NYTS M. Div. Uth Turn interns register for 8 credits for the required two-course sequence, TMU 225/6 Theology and Urban Youth Ministry and 8 credits for Supervised Ministry. Since NYTS launches Uth Turn in 1999 the integration of the Uth Turn field education into supervised ministry has proven to be an invaluable component in our mission to redefine urban youth ministry. For AY 2008-2009 the supervised ministry manual includes information regarding the Uth Turn internship.

To reiterate, in 2003-2004 academic year added to the course requirement for theology and urban youth ministry that each NYTS M. Div. Uth Turn intern write a twenty page “Theology and Urban Youth Ministry Credo.” The theological insights, transformative experiences, lessons learned and stories of lives changed that have been

documented in scores of these credos have demonstrated how NYTS and Uth Turn have redefined and created a new paradigm for urban youth ministry.

To reiterate, this writer would submit Uth Turn is an effective, new model for urban youth ministry that should be replicated nationally. To accomplish this goal I would recommend that NYTS President Dr. Dale T. Irvin propose to the next President of the United States of America that he include in his faith-based initiative a national program that would partner a seminary and a correctional institution and establish a M.P.S. program in each state. This program would be based on the NYTS M.P.S. program at Sing Sing. As these programs produce M.P.S. graduates and these graduates are released they would be employed at Uth Turn facilitators/outreach coordinators. The other component of the Uth Turn model, namely partner church Uth Turn sites and M. Div. graduate Uth Turn interns would be added. I would also submit that NYTS should serve as the lead consultant to the director of the president's faith-based initiative for this project and to the seminaries and correctional institutions who will be starting and operating the master of professional studies programs around the nation. Replicating Uth Turn as a national model for urban youth ministry could potentially transform the lives of millions of at-risk youth.

## CONCLUSION

In 2009 Uth Turn will celebrate its tenth anniversary (1999-2009). During this period we have served and helped thousands of at-risk youth turn their lives around. This remarkable journey of faith has redefined urban youth ministry. New York Theological Seminary launched Uth Turn in 1999 and in these past nine years has expanded the landscape of youth ministry in the City of New York. This new model for urban youth ministry represents a paradigm shift for churches in New York City that has been successful, cost effective and replicable as a national model. In the valley of dry bones God posed this question to Ezekiel: “Mortal can these bones live?” (Ezekiel 37:3b). Under God’s guidance and led by the Holy Spirit New York Theological Seminary prophesized to churches, pastors, congregations, M.P.S. graduates, M.Div. students, and especially to thousands of at-risk youth. Since 1999 these “dry bones” have come alive and the fruits of our collective labor have produced an abundant harvest. NYTS partner churches in all five boroughs of the City of New York have expanded their missions and youth ministries to *include* youth who prior to 1999 were *excluded*. One hundred and four NYTS M. Div. graduate students will have completed this program in the 2008-2009 academic year using and further developing this new paradigm for urban youth ministry. These incredible servants of the most high God are working side by side with equally incredible NYTS M.P.S. graduates who together are rescuing young people – male and

female – from criminality, drugs use and destructive behavior as they preach hope and a future.

Only God could take this program that was started in 1999 as a *one-year* demonstration project and turn it into a program that has positively impacted thousands of young people and will celebrate its *tenth year* anniversary in 2009!

To God be the glory.

“Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power and authority; before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 24-25)

## **Appendix 1: 1998 At Risk Youth Intervention Project**

## **Appendix 2: Youth Turn: A Youth Intervention Project Narrative**

### **Appendix 3: Report of Course of Instruction of Interns**

## **Appendix 4: ComAlert Program Information**



## **Appendix 5: 2002 Report of Ford Foundation Grant**

## **Appendix 6: 1999-2003 Final Evaluation Report**

## **Appendix 7: 2004 Report to the Board of Directors**

## **Appendix 8: NY State OCFS Proposal Addendum Jan-Dec 2005**

## **Appendix 9: FCLD Community Based Development Model**

## **Appendix 10: Uth Turn ATS Summary**

## **Appendix 11: Effects of the Master of Professional Studies Program at Sing Sing**

## **Appendix 12: FCLD Uth Turn Case Statement**



### **Appendix 13: Course Syllabi**

- MMA-283-1 Administering Charitable Choice, Fall A&B, 2000
- THU-270 The Civil Rights Movement
- TMU-254 Slavery and Reparations Fall 2002 and 2004
- Critical Interpretations Fall 2003
- TMU-225 and TTU 226 Theology and Urban Ministry Fall-Spring 2003/2004
- TMU-226 Theology and Urban Ministry Fall 2004
- TMU-226 Theology and Urban Ministry Spring 2005

## **Appendix 14: Urban Male Development & Empowerment Center**

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